DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 095 531 CS 201 433

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TITLE Prescriptivism in American Thought: 1820-1970.
PUB DATE 73
NOTE 142p.; Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio State University

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$6.60 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Factors; *Diachronic Linguistics; Doctoral Theses; *English; Higher Education; *Language Usage; Linguistic Theory; Social Values; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS *Prescriptivism

ABSTRACT

The American concern for prescriptive correctness in linguistic behavior, which derives from eighteenth centry British notions, met with considerable and significant challenge by the contrary descriptive notion in the first half of the nineteenth century. The energy of this challenge waned by mid-century and the prescriptive drive for linguistic uniformity and conformity not only revived, but took on new energy from nineteenth century American culture. The persistence of the prescriptive notion in the minds of educated and intelligent Americans throughout the twentieth century poses an interesting cultural problem. The "Third International" controversy and the black English controversy demonstrate the remarkable hold that the correctness doctrine has on our time. These controversies also give some insight into the means by which the status quo of prescriptivism is maintained within an alien general culture--principally by utilizing genteel co-optive devices and by linking the prescriptive linguistic goals with seemingly desirable social and political goals. (Author/RB)

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PRESCRIPTIVISM IN AMERICAN LINGUISTIC THOUGHT: 1820-1970

by
Glendon Frank Drake

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ABSTRACT

PRESCRIPTIVISM IN AMERICAN
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by
Glendon Frank Drake

Chairman: Joe Lee Davis

The American concern for prescriptive correctness in linguistic behavior, which derives from 18th century British notions, met with considerable and significant challenge by the contrary descriptive notion in the first half of the 19th century. This reaction against the prescriptive notion and the movement toward a descriptive standard of usage as a model for language behavior was informed in general by the romantic milieu of the time. The challenge was energized specifically by a reaction against rote learning and by the development of a national consciousness.

The energy of this challenge waned by mid-century and the prescriptive drive for linguistic uniformity and conformity not only revived, but took on new energy from 19th century American culture. This revival of prescriptivism in the latter half of the century accords neatly with the shift in the general culture toward national integration and consolidation. The genteel tradition, the cultural apparatus of consolidation and integration, played a central role in the revival of prescriptivism.

The persistence of the prescriptive notion in the minds of educated and intelligent Americans throughout the 20th century and up to the present time poses an interesting cultural problem. The considerable amount of linguistic scholarship during this century has consistently

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argued against prescriptivism. The major cultural ethics of the century, science and relativism, militate against prescriptive correctness. Thus, the uncommon strength of continuity of the attitude during the 20th century signals the importance of the 19th century sources. The persistence cannot be explained merely by the expected normal historical continuity, although that too operates in this case.

The explanation lies with the broadening of the educational institution in the mid-19th century in confluence with urbanization with its ethic of mobility, and the genteel tradition with its reassertion of puritan values of community. Thus institutionalized, the prescriptive notion is carried forward by the school discipline of "English."

The Third International controversy and the Black English controversy demonstrate the remarkable hold that the correctness doctrine has on our own time. These controversies also give some insight into the means by which the status quo of prescriptivism is maintained within an alien general culture--principally by genteel co-optive devices and by linking the prescriptive linguistic goals with seemingly desirable social and political goals.

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PREFACE

This study grows out of my teaching and study during recent years in both linguistics and American studies. But my very personal interest in the subject reaches back to my freshman undergraduate days, when as a speaker of a rural southern mountain dialect I was confronted by the cultivated dialect and elaborated code of a central Ohio university community, and suffered the trauma and enjoyed the insights which attended the dynamics of the mutual adjustments between that community and me.

I wish to thank all the members of my doctoral committee, and to especially acknowledge gratefully the many contributions, at all stages of my graduate study, of the chairman, Professor Joe Lee Davis. I must also render special acknowledgement of my debt and gratitude to Professor John Higham, whose teaching and writing illuminated my linguistic data and educational experiences, and whose interpretation of 19th century American history informs this paper.

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INTRODUCTION

The linguistic thought of Americans has long been marked by a concern for "correctness." Americans have sought in their language to enforce a uniformity and conformity to some absolute standard. This concern derives from 18th century prescriptionist linguistics, which embodied an attempt to control and regulate the language. This regulation was undertaken in accordance with the absolute standard of reason through nature. Since the men of the late 17th century and of the 18th century were steeped in Latin, they thought of it as the "universal" or "natural" language and of its structure as the universal grammar. Consequently, in the mold of Latin grammar was cast by analogy the rules that were to prescribe linguistic behavior for English speakers.[1] Prescriptive grammar implies above all, authority; it also implies order, stability, predictability, and reason.

A contrary notion that will play a role in this narrative of ideas is the notion of descriptive linguistics, which concentrates on analyzing language as it currently functions. Descriptivism emphasizes change over stability, diversity over uniformity, usage over authority, and the spoken language over the written language.

The keystone of correctness is conformity. Correctness gravitates naturally to the camp of prescriptivism. Between correctness and descriptivism is a basic contrariety.

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The concern for correctness is patently manifest in recent American experience. Marckwardt points out that the consequence has been that people have a guilt complex about the language they use, and that " . . . few Americans, even among the well-educated, are confident and assured of the essential aptness and correctness of their speech."[2] Daniel Boorstin in The Americans has exposed in the colonial experience of Americans a strong concern for uniformity and correctness and the quest for a standard.[3] It has been assumed, therefore, that the doctrine of correctness has existed through the American experience essentially unchanged and unchallenged. For example, one scholar concerned with 19th century textbooks has concluded that the story of grammar in 18th and 19th century America is the story of the process by which the prescriptive "dreary grind" of Latin grammar was replaced by the equally futile grind of English grammar,[4] that

> From the very beginning it seems that English grammar was intended to perform for the mother tongue the same functions Latin grammar performed for that language. In each the grammatical study of the language was fundamental . . . this identity of function is powerfully supported by the striking similarity in content and in methods of study as expounded by textbook makers.[5]

A careful examination of linguistic thought of the 19th century reveals that the virtually universal assumption that the roots of the prescriptive doctrine reach back undisturbed to the 18th century is too simple and inaccurate. The prescriptive doctrine met with significant intellectual challenge in the decades of the 20's, 30's and 40's. Moreover, the thought of the decades of the 50's, 60's, and 70's was a significant source of the doctrine's subsequent vigor, inasmuch as there was in these decades an increased, conscious drive for linguistic conformity. In short, aspects of 19th century American

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life, as well as 18th century life, are important in the American's drive for correctness. In addition, the prescriptive correctness doctrine exhibits a curious and remarkable continuity into and throughout the present century. This continuity is achieved against heavy odds given the contrary cultural forces. This feature of the prescriptive correctness pattern emphasizes again the importance of 19th century culture to linguistic attitudes.

The first part of the study, Chapters One and Two, covers the 19th century, concentrating in the period 1825-1875. The second part of the study, Chapters Three, Four, and Five, deals with the 20th century. The basic data for the first part of the study are three major educational journals that span much of the period. They are examined not only for the texts they provide but also for hints to other sources, important figures and books, which in turn become data for the study. The basic data for the second part of the study are the same, except that in the 20th century these sources become considerably more numerous, diverse and specialized, so that in the case of journals the study draws from those concerned with English language and speech.

The study focuses on thought, rather than on action and behavior; the nature of the sources does not permit accurate and full understanding of linguistic behavior.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE CHALLENGE TO PRESCRIPTIVISM: 1825-1851

Life is our dictionary. Years are well spent in country labors: in town,--in the insight into trades and manufactures; in frank intercourse with many men and women; in science; in art; to the one end of mastering in all their facts a language by which to illustrate and embody our perceptions. I learn immediately from any speaker how much he has already lived, through the poverty or the splendor of his speech. Life lies behind us as the quarry from whence we get tiles and copestones for the masonry of to-day. This is the way to learn grammar. Colleges and books only copy the language which the field and the work-yard made.

Ralph Waldo Emerson,
The American Scholar

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The reaction against prescriptive grammar in the first half of the 19th century grew partly out of a specific revolt against rote learning, partly out of the development of national consciousness--both of which phenomena were part of the general milieu of romantic expansiveness which marked the period. The result was that linguistic attitudes shifted significantly from prescriptive correctness toward the standard of usage, toward descriptive standards.

In 1827, a writer in the American Journal of Education in discussing "Defects in the System of Liberal Education" and in condemning the study of Latin and Greek as "pernicious," moves to the subject of grammar in general, including English grammar:

> The practical truth respecting the relation of school, school boy, and grammar is, that grammar is not learned, and never can be learned, at a school, and that the attempt to teach it, the mode of teaching it, and the pretense of teaching a language through it, are insults to the common sense of mankind . . . [Grammar] . . . has been . . . a stumbling block and . . . a trammel, in chaining bold and free spirits.[6]

He finally blames rote learning of grammar rules for the rowdy behavior of the 19th century schoolboys. Another writer on common education in the same year in the same journal points out the first book placed in a schoolboy's hands is usually a "concise abridgement" of English grammar, " . . . a mere skeleton of declensions and rules . . . ." He points out further that the understanding of the child is utterly incompetent to grasp the meaning of such rules, or apply them to the forms of speech which he uses. He finally makes the point that the rules of grammar taught in school are not workable anyway. "It is not true, as is generally supposed, that the pupil acquires, in this way, a knowledge of his vernacular tongue." Then he states the usage doctrine: "The natural mode of acquiring language is by imitation; children are regulated in their use of the forms of speech, by the

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custom of those with whom they are conversant . . . ."[7] This appeal to leave usage to its natural mother, unconscious, unforced imitation, instead of to prescriptive rule is common in this period in the sources for this study.[8]

The strength of anti-rote conviction can sometimes be seen in the unusual tone of the comments. A writer on the "Essential Branches in Systems of Popular Education" in answering the question of what the essential branches of education are comes to grammar and immediately grows ironic and sarcastic: "Children must be all taught to parse. They are almost taught to believe, that a knowledge of parsing contains, at least, the essence of all the arts and sciences. . . . the children in the United States have parsed themselves out of two millions of years of time, and out of the power of learning language, or any other subject, understandably, and into a disgust for everything that bears the name of learning."[9] Another writer offers an opinion that rote learning of grammar rules is a waste of time and money, and he even calculates the cost: 10 million dollars in 30 years.[10]

George Ticknor in 1833 in a "Lecture on the Best Methods of Teaching the Living Language" states very clearly and directly one of the basic premises of the descriptive doctrine: that the fundamental language is the spoken language, " . . . the only foundation on which written language is built or can rest."[11]

Of course, the reaction against rote learning notwithstanding, people were not always willing to leave language learning to usage altogether. The prescriptive tradition would not die so easily. Instead, they sought another method, which they generally designated the "inductive system," (very much suggestive of the "discovery method" of the pedagogy of this present time) to apply to language instruction

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as well as to other branches of learning. (The method appears in the sources under a number of other labels.) The method would ideally create the "natural" language learning situation.

> The principle upon which [this] . . . system [is] founded is . . . that the structure and peculiarities of a language are best learned by habitual observation and imitation; by considering the structure as a whole (and not in its disjointed parts), and by noting its peculiarities as they occur. To fix these peculiarities in the mind, one of two ways must be resorted to; either they must be made the subject of distinct and separate rules, and impressed on the memory by the ordinary process of learning by rote, or they must be translated so literally as to arrest the attention by their very discordance with and remoteness from, our own idiom. . . . it is obvious that a language might be acquired . . . by what is called the natural mode, this is by imitation without so much as the consciousness that speech is the subject of rules.[12]

As a reviewer in the American Journal of Education says, "The method adopted must in a word be that of induction and not that of arbitrary assumption."[13] This statement hits at the heart of prescriptivism and correctness, and in the same way does a series of articles run in 1825 by the United States Literary Gazette which exposes common systems of rote learning and of parsing to be "folly." One article deals with the prescriptive rule that the nominative case shall govern the verb in number and person, observing that " . . . this, so far as it regards the use of words, is learned when the language is learned, and not from grammars: . . . all that the scholar learns from this, and most other parts of our grammars is to apply certain technical terms to what he perfectly understood before."[14] Another article of the series complains of "artificial classes" built by grammarians, and concludes that prescriptive grammars not only confuse and mislead with useless technicality, but they also fail to correspond to the reality of the language of people who use the grammar. The article provides copious illustration of this.[15] Thus it can be seen that

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what may have started as an aspect of the revolt against rote learning soon expands into a much broader discussion of issues central to the descriptive-prescriptive tension.

One William Samuel Cardell, whose book of 1825, Essay on Language, is used in this study to mark the beginning of the period of reaction against prescription, offers one of the clearest perceptions of the broader issues. Cardell illustrates also the difficulty in the obtaining of descriptive ideals. Cardell sees grammar as taught in the schools and colleges "opposed to fact, to science, and to common sense . . ."; the rules as "artificial, perplexing, contradictory, and impracticable . . . ." He sees two opposite opinions prevailing as regards change in language. On one hand language is said to be fixed, and can admit no change: " . . . Dr. Johnson has settled its vocabulary, Walker, Sheridan, and Jones, its pronunciation; and Murray its grammatical rules; and every attempt to change them is fraught with mischief." [16] The other opinion is " . . . that a living language can neither be arrested nor guided in its course, more than the wind can be chained."[17] Cardell believes neither is true to the extent it is urged, but what is important is that he has articulated what is a constant tension in linguistic history and philosophy, the tension between change and stability; and by merely stating alternatives in the face of his judgments about prescriptive grammar as taught in the schools, he suggests a challenge to the prescriptive system. As it so happens, in his system Cardell tries to apply logic and analogy to analysis and probably ends up confounding the laissez faire attitude preached; but it is important he was clearly conscious of a basic problem.

Another figure relevant to this issue who failed to practice what he preached was Noah Webster. Webster is usually supposed to have been

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a linguistic legislator, a prescriptive lexicographer; and this supposition is not altogether mistaken, although it has often been overemphasized. The fact is that Webster is clearly ambivalent on the point in his writings. Although he consistently exaggerates the degree of uniformity a descriptive method of language analysis would produce, in his writings about language Webster is often decidedly sympathetic to the descriptive point of view. Webster is an important figure and his place in this story has often been distorted. Here, for example, are extracts from a public letter published in 1826.[18]

> I have been an attentive observer of the progress of orthography for 50 years, and am satisfied that . . . all efforts to establish a standard, have only served to unsettle the language, and multiply diversities. We learn . . . the language by traditions, and by associating with respectable people--and the force of common usage cannot be resisted.[19]

If his dictionaries are not descriptive, it is probably because Webster lacked the conceptual and methodological tools to make careful objective descriptions and valid inferences from them and, therefore, to achieve such a dictionary. These tools would not begin to be available until the second half of his own century, and would not be really sophisticated until the 20th century. In the 20th century these descriptive lexicographical tools result in Webster's Third New International Dictionary, the publication of which calls forth again the prescriptive controversy. Chapter Four of this study deals with that controversy.

Some key sources of the reaction against prescriptivism consist of attacks on Murray's Grammar that occurred especially in the 20's and 30's. Lindley Murray is the father of American prescriptive grammar, in the sense that the wide-spread use of his textbooks greatly extended the influence of his prescriptive views. Murray, an American who spent much time in England, wrote the grammar book, English Grammar,

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that was to obtain the widest usage and to exert the most influence in America.[20] The book was first published in England in 1794, and first abridged in Philadelphia in 1797. One collection today contains twenty-four different Murray Grammars published by sixteen different publishers from 1797 to 1870.[21]

One of the first attacks on Murray was printed under an editor's introduction that is worth noting because it caught the romantic spirit of the times that helped to energize the challenge. The editor recommends the article to " . . . the attentive consideration of those . . . readers who, in communicating knowledge to the young, are unwilling to be bound to a tame acquiescence in the opinions of others, no matter how distinguished . . . ."[22] The writer of the article attacks Murray's Grammar on the ground that it provides a " . . . foreign rack on which our simple language has been stretched . . . ."[23] He goes back to Lowth, the great 18th century prescriptive grammarian and Murray's mentor, inspiration, and source, to establish that English prescriptive grammar was cast in the model of Latin, that " . . . English grammar was made as much like the Latin as it was possible to make it." Since English is not Latin, and since only "one in a thousand" is expected to study Latin, most " . . . are expected to study a great deal of useless, and less than useless material."[24] The rejection of the assumption of a universal, absolute grammar is clear in this attack. If Latin is not the "universal grammar," the reason for its study is lost.

The American Journal of Education ran from July to December in 1826 a series of "Strictures on Murray's Grammar" devoted to detailed examination of the inconsistencies of Murray's rules against what the writer believes is actual behavior.[25] In 1827, a reviewer of one of the many "arrangements" of Murray's "exercises" complains of " . . .

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Murray's didactic taste . . . ," and urges that " . . . the grammarian give way to the writer."[26] He asserts that

> there must be a fashion in language as in other things: no branch of science can be exempt from the rule of caprice, unless at the expense of the chance of progressive improvement; and a liberal and truly refined taste will always overlook precision and rigid accuracy, for the laws of general usage. This is not a matter of mere taste, or of theoretic discussion. There is a necessity about it. We must speak and rightly so as to be understood; and, to this end, we must speak and write by the rules of common consent . . . . [27]

Goold Brown, a grammarian who will have a more important role later in the story, published in 1832 a long two-installment attack on Murray's Grammars. Brown affirms "present, reputable, general use" over ancient prescriptions, and condemns grammarians for merely copying Murray's rules.[28] While the attackers still exhibit a sense of linguistic "purity" and propriety, they seek standards in a description of the actual linguistic behavior, rather than in presumed, prescriptive behavior.

Asa Rand's 1833 "Lecture on Teaching Grammar and Composition" serves as a fitting final piece of evidence of the reaction against prescriptivism, for in this lecture he clearly sets forth premises of a distinctly descriptive cast. In addition, he exhibits the characteristic hesitation to accept completely all of the implications of the descriptive approach. Rand's basic premise is that every language has grammatical construction which is independent of a written system of rules. His point is that the written rules of construction should conform to the usages of the language, but should never try to control them. He uses the example of a language of non-literate people. Rand points out that although the speakers of the language are consciously ignorant of the principle of the construction of the language to whose "rules of speech" they conform every hour of the day, those principles

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exist and could be laid down in a grammatical treatise. After thus implying the rather radical notion of the fundamental importance of spoken language, Rand goes on to comment on the appropriate role of the grammarian. He says that the grammarian in forming a system for a written and cultivated language should "discover" and not "invent" his rules. The writer on grammar should "acquire facts." Usages should give laws to man, to grammarians, not vice-versa. Rand would have teachers of grammar made aware of "this simple fact of language."[29]

"What," asks Rand, "is the legitimate province of one who prepares an original treatise on grammar? . . . it is, to ascertain the principles and usages that exist . . . ."[30] But he appears to be somewhat uneasy with all of the implications of this when he hedges toward "correctness" in appending to his lecture: "It pertains also to the writer of a grammatical treatise, to expose inelegancies, vulgarisms, anomalous constructions, foreign and barbarous admixtures, and whatever else appears to him inconsistent with the genius and best usages of the language . . . ." But significantly he softens this with the further statement: "In discharging this service, his [the grammarian's] <u>suggestions</u> [italics added] will be received with respectful attention, in proportion as he has earned the reputation for . . . fidelity, . . . judgment, and skill . . . ."[31] If Rand would appear to waver toward correctness finally (which he probably does not), it is not the rigid dogmatic correctness which appears later in the story.

Much of the effect of national consciousness in the challenge can be seen in the foregoing discussion of the revolt against the rote learning of rules and against parsing, and in the broader discussion of linguistic issues that this revolt elicited. Nationalism was involved more specifically in the challenge to 18th century prescrip-

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tivism because the prescriptions and proscriptions came, naturally enough, to be associated with Britain and the authority of Britain. As the United States sought and in a measure gained an exuberant sense of national identity and integrity, some of the authority of the 18th century rules weakened, and some of the people of the United States began to look to themselves for standards for speech and writing, and to distrust, indeed to disdain, British standards. As a consequence of the rejection of British standards, the prescriptive system was not necessarily, and, it appears, in the 20's, 30's, and 40's, not usually replaced in the minds of linguists by another prescriptive system. Rather, in the period under consideration, there was definite thought in terms of descriptive standards.

Although the sense of national consciousness is often implicit in the revolt against rote, one important source of the challenge of prescriptivism may serve to illustrate specifically how the challenge may start from a feeling of nationalism. The source, a book by James Brown can, indeed, be taken as something of a capstone of the challenge. It was published in 1845, near the end of the challenge. In style and tone it is exuberant and strikingly romantic, a far cry from the "dry-as-dust" 18th century grammar. The title, even, is perfectly apt: An Appeal from the Old Theory of English Grammar. James Brown's point is that the "British system" may answer all the purposes of theory, but it cannot answer to practice. It consists of "silly rules, ridiculous notes, and nickname definitions." Every man should understand the language of his own country." [italics supplied] Brown believes that the English language is young and in a "progressive state." He proposes a "revolution in the means by which the laws of English . . . are acquired." He scoffs at the defenses of prescriptive

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grammar. In their defense, he says, "The dignity of their origin is pleaded--the few services they have rendered, are urged--the inconvenience of change, is exaggerated-- . . . innovation is belied, and presented in all the terrors of disorder, dilaceration, and ruin--and the innovator himself is held up as a pest to society--an enemy to truth as some refractory spirit seeking destruction in the ruin of those noble fabrics which have been finished by genius . . . ." All of this is in vain, claims Brown, for truth will out. " . . . the sea of life, . . . will rise in anger, and will swallow up that compass, be it constructed by whom it may, which has been unfaithful to the mariner, in his voyage for science, art, or fame." Even so, " . . . innovators, inventors, and improvers, the distinguished benefactors of the human race, are now subjected to torture upon the rack of the public press."[32] Here he apparently refers to the conservative reaction to the challenge of the prescriptive system.

In explaining the challenge to prescriptive correctness both general and specific forces must be presented. It is important to view the specific developments already discussed and developed in the general intellectual tenor of the times, boundlessness and romanticism.

In the age of boundlessness[33] men felt emancipated from all external restraints. There was a partial revolt against the restraint of reason, on which 18th century grammarians had based their prescriptions. Men did not feel in this age as they had in the 18th century the need to defer to superiors in matters social or linguistic. Finally, the 18th century imposed a static model on linguistic behavior. The age of boundlessness was more inclined to see the world as dynamic and growing.

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Some of the general elements of romanticism are part and parcel of boundlessness; but, in addition, romanticism consisted, for one thing, of the revolt of the imagination against convention and classicism, of the escape from restraint, balance, and reason, the raison d'etre of prescriptivism. It is interesting to note here that while romanticism seems to have been related to 18th century empiricism, the 18th century linguistic prescriptivism represents a victory of the rational side of the enlightenment over the empirical. Consequently, there may be a built-in opposition here that in a broadly philosophical way nourished the challenge to prescriptivism in the 19th century. Moreover, romanticism contributed the idea of development, of "organic dynamism" to the intellectual equipment of men. Insofar as the idea was accepted it made nonsense of the 18th century static view of the world, on which was based the idea of 18th century grammar. It is this process view of the world that contributed greatly to making the 19th century in Europe the great age of historical linguistics. Finally, the romantic quest for variety, diversity, and uniqueness leads away from the norms of the 18th century, for it depends upon an individual's personal point of view; it seeks and celebrates what is unique, original, and creative. It ultimately leads to differences rather than to standards--for the idea of "correctness" this is death.

Within this general intellectual framework the specific events that facilitated the challenge to prescriptivism were the development of national consciousness, the revolt against rote learning and the concommitant development of "inductive" teaching methods. The challenge was accommodated by these events because the rules which came to be questioned were the absolute rules of the 18th century grammarians, represented especially by Lindley Murray. The effort to replace the

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rule of the book forced recognition, in the light of contemporary intellectual and social forces, of alternative bases for linguistic norms; usage emerged as the dominant alternative. The norms of the spoken language and the norms of the contemporary situation gained new importance. In addition, the perception of difference between British and American norms and between the rule of the book and the rule of usage created in some people a new sense of possibility for diversity and change in language without corruption and decay.

The new sense was to be short lived.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE REVIVAL OF PRESCRIPTIVISM: 1851-1875

"Correct," "Right," "Wrong," "Grammatical," "Ungrammatical," "Authority," "Webster's Dictionary,"--these are the everyday words of the school room.

George Hempel, 1903

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The second section of this study explores the period 1851 to 1875.

Looking back across this period in 1903, George Hempel rose in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to deliver the presidential address to the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association. Perhaps with an eye cast to another part of Ann Arbor where the State Teachers' Association was meeting at the same time, Hempel spoke on the subject: "The Teacher of English and His Attitude Toward His Subject."

Hempel said he spoke for the "enlightened scholar" to the teacher and average man whom he found to hold antiquated and mistaken notions about the nature of language and the functions of the teacher. He developed these notions: First, the teacher and the outside public think of language as something primarily in books; the spoken language is thought to be only a practical application. To the teachers of English, language and literature are confounded. The English language is equated with the written language. The spoken language is patronized as "colloquial," and appreciated only insofar as it approaches written language. Second, there is a contradictory phase to the thinking of teachers and the average man: We speak a careless and generally reprehensible English; elsewhere cultivated and educated people speak correct and precise English. The teacher is not sure of the locus of perfection--Boston? Virginia, perhaps? Britain? But no matter how elusive or uncertain, there is a perfect or standard way somewhere or other. What are the guides to it? Books: dictionaries, primarily; and "for superior souls," "the works" of such writers as Richard Grant White. Finally, Hempel said, teachers believe that language stands in great danger of corruption and deterioration. The "united efforts of all lovers of the mother tongue are needed to preserve it."[34]

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Thus Hempel summarizes the attitudes and notions that had developed up to his own time. The consequence, he said, is that "the teacher is constantly picking up in the speech of his pupils petty points which seem to him to be ungrammatical or incorrect. Instead of teaching them to respect and use their mother tongue, he leads them to distrust it, and be afraid of using it for fear it might not accord with the speech of books or with somebody else's mother tongue."[35] Hempel goes on to develop what he considers enlightened descriptive notions of language, but in reviewing the notions of teachers and the outside public Hempel signaled a rigid doctrine of correctness, which appears to have learned nothing from the earlier challenge. While the doctrine for correctness had never really been dead in America, it had surely abated during the time of the romantic challenge in the second quarter of the century. An examination of the second half of the century, especially the first quarter of the second half, reveals that the doctrine of correctness revived with new vehemence in a new drive for uniformity and conformity. It became a <u>mania</u> for correctness.

This mania was facilitated and accommodated in general by the intellectual milieu of the time, national integration and consolidation; the single most important specific factor was the development of the genteel cultural apparatus, as manifested linguistically by an increased interest in language, especially in "linguistic etiquette" in genteel publications; in the reaction against innovation; in the application of intellect and logic to language; in the high premium placed by the genteel on books and authority; in the anglophile tendency of the genteel; and in the desire for a responsible, stable community.

In 1855 one writer remarks that the increased attention given to language " . . . is one of the most marked of literary aspects of our

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time."[36] Indeed, the attention given to language, especially to "polite speech" in books and especially in genteel magazines of the second half of the century, is remarkable. Galaxy published over 450 pages of discussion of words and usages in less than twelve years of life. Most were written by Richard Grant White, who will appear presently as a central maniac for correctness. The Nation published Fitzedward Hall's replies to White, serving to create a long genteel war. Round Table published a long series on linguistic etiquette by G. Washington Moon. A series of "Hints on Language" appeared in Godey's in 1871-1872. Mott remarks that "indeed most general magazines gave attention to both popular and literary speech," especially between 1865 and 1885.[37]

"'A Webster! A Webster!' and 'Worcester to the rescue!' have been the battle cries heard above the cannon of Napoleon," comments Vanity Fair in 1860. "The schoolmen have been much exercised of late by the dictionary war."[38] The appearance of the quarto edition of Worcester's Dictionary in 1860 set off a rivalry between it and the Goodrich revision of the New Webster, a rivalry in which apparently nearly every literate person took sides.[39] The rivalry took the form finally of a law suit that was to last for decades. This "Great Dictionary War" is an intriguing story in itself; but what is important in this context is what the rivalry and litigation was all about: authority--over which dictionary was the final arbiter in matters linguistic. The dictionary by the 60's had become a big business, due largely to the great waves of immigrants seeking linguistic passport to the society[40] and due to many native born Americans using linguistic conformity as a means to mobility.

That there should be such a fuss over a dictionary indicates the degree of popular concern in seeking a uniform standard made concrete

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in a dictionary. That there was such aspiration is clear from such statements as, for example, that of Isaiah Dole in 1857:

> A perfect dictionary would omit no point upon which it could legitimately be consulted. It would not stop at approximate notions; it would present exact and accurate ideas. It would not merely be a useful counsellor, but the thoroughly informed and discreet umpire, to whose judgment any point in dispute might be safely left without revision.[41]

Clearly here is a dictionary for the hypercorrect: a dictionary that prescribes what ought to be, rather than reports what is. But even Dole will not go so far as one Dr. Dick and Chancellor Kent; for he chides the former for believing that "ages will elapse before any other dictionary of the English language will be required" after Webster's American Dictionary of the English Language; and he chides the latter who claims for the same dictionary " . . . the distinction of embodying the language, and hence predicts for it a duration outlasting the pyramids, and coextensive with the globe itself."[42] The assumption of Dick and Kent about the stability of language is clear here. Noah Porter in a long, definitive article on English lexicography in 1863 calls for an "ideally perfect" dictionary, in the sense of the prescriptive ideal.[43]

The period covered in the first part of this study was the great period of "innovation" in the linguistic behavior of Americans. Innovation denotes changes in language that have occurred in the United States but not in Britain.[44] Such a change is more popularly called an "Americanism," especially by the English, who have never tired of collecting them and putting them on display. After mid-century there was a spirited attack on the phenomenon of innovation. In 1860 the North American Review published an attack on the notion of innovation in the form of a denial that American English is a dialectical variant of British English. This article expressed a very interesting and

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important premise. The article begins by pointing out that " . . . full license allowed to this great, free American people to modify the language, as they have modified customs, institutions and laws, quite independent of foreign models, so as to adapt it to the peculiar wants and characteristics of the American mind."[45] The article continues by pointing out that there is marked folly in this, and especially in the fact that while not many writers go so far as to insist on an American language, " . . . yet they do insist upon being absolved for all allegiance, and even from any special deference, to English use and authority."[46] The important premise upon which this judgment of foolishness is based is the "fact" that

> before the English language became domecilated in this country, it had reached a point of maturity beyond which no very great and radical changes were to be expected . . . . [It] had attained a point in its development at which more was to be feared from its not being improved . . . . Its shape had been fixed in a sterling literature.[47]

Here is the return to the 18th century ideals of order, stability, and authority in a 19th century genteel context.

Perhaps the best way to demonstrate the attack on innovation is to go to an article, "Americanisms: A Study of Words and Manners," which appeared in an 1871 issue of the Southern Review.[48] This journal was patently and belligerently antidemocratic and is probably not representative of the sources of the time, but this particular article sums up in extreme but crystal form the feelings that flicker throughout other thought of the time. The writer, too, centers on a denial that American English is a dialect, and the argument in this regard must be the most novel--indeed surrealistic--in all the ordeal of American English.

The argument is that the consequence of so many dialects in America on one ground has been that they have destroyed themselves,

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instead of propagating themselves as English. Therefore, the argument continues, American English is not only not a dialectical variation of British English, but indeed it is a sort of non-dialect, a "homogeneous character of many dialects."[49] This perplexity aside, the author of this article displays a clear attitude toward innovation.

> . . . we have found Americanisms to be . . . perversions of the best form of the English Language,--perversions not only unlicensed, but indefensible, unseemly, and vicious. . . . they have not given us a better language than the English, but have crippled our speech seriously, and made it far inferior to the mother tongue in force, in flexibility, in rhythmic proportion, in precision and correctness, and in idiomatic life and character . . . . The barbarisms which we have introduced have been . . . the vulgar effects of untamed exuberance of youth and vitality . . . . We have . . . turned a cold shoulder to the precedents of good grammar.[50]

To illustrate this point the author laments the loss of distinction between shall and will, a locution, he may have been surprised to learn, that a mathematician, John Wallis, had concocted largely out of his own imagination on a lazy Sunday afternoon in the 17th century. The author of the Southern Review article attacks Ralph Waldo Emerson, among others--for " . . . inaccuracies in use of particles." After observing that we have even fallen so low as to borrow words from the "indecent librettos of Offenbach," the writer quotes a long passage from Whitman's Leaves of Grass, upon which he comments to end his piece. The poetry, he says, offers passages of great power and tenderness. Certainly it is flush with young imagination, and it even exhibits genius and original thought--but it will never do. It exhibits "bad grammar [significantly the first objection], unbridled license of speech, . . . vicious . . . bad heart, . . . [and a] ribald tongue." Altogether, " . . . what a rough, reckless thing this passage is."[51]

As a monument to the beginning of the period of the mania for correctness, the Grammar of English Grammars by Goold Brown[52] looms

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large, figuratively and literally, owing to its ponderous weight of 1102 large pages, many filled with two closely printed columns of fantastically small print. This is the same Goold Brown, not to be confused with James Brown, who in 1832 had joined the challenge to prescription in opting for descriptive standards. Now in 1851 with the publication of his Magnum Opus, his "complete grammar of the English language," he has come full circle. He presents his great tome of corrections in cause of "grammatical purity[,] . . . the violation [of which] is much more conspicuous than the observance. . . . I know not whether any other improvement of it ought to be attempted, than the correcting of those improprieties . . . ever tending to debase it, and the careful teaching of its true grammar, according to its real importance in education."[53]

Brown has such an obsession with correctness that he devotes an entire section of his very long introduction defending his use of the concept, specifically his use of the terms "Correctness" and "Correctly." In justifying this defense he alludes to the challenge to prescriptivism. An explanation of "Correctness" is required, he says, because earlier grammarians had considered the term "vague," in relation to grammar, as " . . . destitute of any signification proper to grammar."[54] His defense consists almost entirely of a long list of definitions of grammar, mostly Latin definitions, which use the term "correct" or a synonym. It ends with a definition from an English grammarian, a definition which Brown stresses and which can stand as a banner to his position: "Grammar is the art of reading, speaking, and writing a language by rules."[55] Brown's argument, merely, is that his use of the concept "correctness" is valid because it is, <u>ipse dixit</u>, valid.

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Brown makes no significant appeal to usage. His appeal is to the "universal grammar" of "logic," "reason," "sense." He would not abide linguistic change as reflected in contemporary writers: "Criticism must not resign the protection of letters. The natural literature of a country is in the keeping, not of the people at large, but of authors and teachers."[56] Therefore, there is need that an "able and discreet" grammarian should now and then appear, "who with skillful hand can effect those corrections which a change of fashion or the ignorance of authors may have made necessary . . . ."[57] Thus the cultural apparatus protects with reason and with the authority of the classics. There is no appeal to usage, but a correction of usage.

Although Goold Brown is an important figure in linguistics in the 19th century and a signal figure in the history of correctness; and while there is certainly no reason to doubt his industry, there is reason often to question the depth and quality of his intellect. About the intellectual quality of George Perkins Marsh there is no question. He was an accredited academic intellectual. His thirty-three "Lectures on the English Language," which were prepared and delivered at Columbia College as post-graduate lectures in 1858-59, offer important insights into the mania for correctness. Marsh has an important place in the world-wide story of the development of philology which is rather too long, complex and probably irrelevant to develop here, although it is the most important feature of his lectures. His lectures are important to this story because of the emotional tension--the genuine sense of anxiety--that they reveal in Marsh's thoughts about the language.

Marsh perceives a close connection between language and culture. He believes that English has been much affected by "extraneous, alien,

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and discordant influences, . . . much overloaded with adventitious appendages."[58] He acknowledges the great assimilative power of English, but, in spite of this power, he says, there has come into the language much which has never become " . . . connatural to the anglican people . . . ." Indeed, he continues, English " . . . has lost its original organic law of progress, and its present growth is by accretion, not by development. . . . English is not a language which teaches itself by mere unreflecting usage. It can be mastered, in all its wealth, in all its power, only by conscious, persistent labor . . . ."[59] Therefore, Marsh concludes in his first lecture, America should awaken to the special importance of studying its own language, so that the struggle may be joined, and the language and thus the culture of the "anglican people" preserved. Thus it is that Marsh reveals a basic anxiety, and thus it is, too, it may be added, that in Marsh, as in many of his fellows, that persistent American strain of puritanism joins the strain of the enlightenment and boundlessness in the story of correctness.

Marsh is especially worried about diversity in the language causing diversity both within the United States and between the two "anglican" nations. He sees the existence of local dialects as a serious obstacle to "natural progress," to patriotism, to the creation of a popular literature and especially to "the diffusion of a general culture." He sees in the disintegration of language norms the symbol of the disintegration of the nation and of the Atlantic community. In this Marsh is caught on the horns of the dilemma between change and stability in language, and he communicates a genuine sense of urgency. He recognizes that change in language is inevitable, but he feels the strong need to check it, " . . . to retard the decay of our tongue, and to prevent its dissipation . . . ."[60]

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Marsh illustrates the basic anxiety that underpins the mania for correctness. "Decay" and "corruption" are recurrent terms throughout his thirty-three lectures. Diversity is his chief worry. Restraint is his key tool.

In one of the lectures Marsh touches on the importance of language for personal impressions, noting that distortions of the mother tongue are offensive, that " . . . we regard a fellow citizen who speaks a marked provincial dialect with contempt and aversion . . . ." It is probably fair to assume that this aspect of correctness was very important in the Gilded Age, marked as it was by urbanization and relatively extreme mobility. It probably accounts in great part for the wide sale of dictionaries and grammars outside of the schools, and, perhaps, it could account in a large part for the mania itself. Unfortunately, the nature of the evidence for this study for this time does not illuminate this aspect. The aspect is discussed, as for example, in an article by Vermont University professor M. M. Buckham,[61] but largely as an aspect of the genteel cultural apparatus.

Buckham speaks of "pure English" as the "potent secret" for favorable personal expression, and much of his article contains prescriptions for plumbing this secret. He believes, too, that correctness is a fair and meaningful criterion for personal judgment, for, after all, a man's grammar reveals the state of his soul. And, moreover, the study of grammar is the study of the "universal laws of the mind." Unfortunately, laments Buckham, current common speech is grievously debased; so, indeed, is much judicial, literary, legislative, and scientific speech. There is in America one shining exception to the state of impurity: the clergy.

> . . . Indeed it would be impossible to compute the indebtedness of our public to their educated ministry for their example and influence in favor of correct speaking. In many of our smaller

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> and remoter communities, the minister's example is almost the only one that keeps the sound of anything like correct English in the popular ear.[62]

The divine, descending from the city on a hill, may have found his role shrunk but it had grown no less singular.

The role of correctness in non-genteel society--in the lower and working classes--is hard to know from the evidence; not so the role of correctness in the common schools, where some children from these strata spent some time. It is instructive here to recall the sarcastic tone of the comments about grammar in the common schools of the 30's and 40's. An 1870 report of the Commissioner of Education, District of Columbia, asserts the great value of language training as mere intellectual training, but says the object is attained " . . . by teaching it solely with the view to secure correct expression." He urges not just the study of rules and of parsing, but the doing of exercises as well, the chief of which should be " . . . the parsing and analyzing of what is right, and the correcting of what is wrong."[63] There is no irony or sarcasm in the commissioner's tone. In 1878 a speaker before the National Education Association sounds the genteel note by urging the study of English even over classical languages because of the worth of English in the practical affairs of real life, and because " . . . the <u>right</u> [italics supplied] study of English may be made the instrument of the highest culture of the mind."[64]

Marsh, Buckham and the Commissioner's report neatly reveal concerns with linguistic correctness, but Richard Grant White is the central figure of the 19th century correctness. He is central because he was enormously popular and, judging from the prolific references to him and his work in the data, he was widely influential. A book concerned exclusively with the "correctness and fitness" of verbal expressions and compiled

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from White's contributions to Galaxy from 1867 to 1869 went through several editions and to this day stands not in the stacks but on the reference shelf of such an important library as the University of Michigan Graduate Library.

> White's credo: "I believe, assert and endeavor to maintain that in language, as in morals, there is a higher law than mere usage . . . . This law is the law of reason, toward a conformity to which usage itself is always struggling . . . ."[65]

In the face of change, White argues that change is orderly, rational and regular, "that there is nothing irregular in language generally." Every phenomenon is founded on a law; nothing in language is the product of a haphazard or arbitrary will. If the facts should indicate differently, it is merely, he argues, that the law has not yet been discovered. " . . . it remains the noblest task of linguistics to strive after its discovery and elucidation . . . ." As for the authority of eminent writers, creative ability, to White, insured its possessor " . . . no greater certainty of correctness . . ." than a lesser being. Nor would White have anything to do with the new and growing historical linguistics. Taste and reason alone were not only necessary, but sufficient. White was not overly optimistic about his mission; he did not expect to purge away much corruption, but he did hope "to arrest it in some measure by giving hints that help toward wholesomeness."[66]

What were his hints and wholesomeness? His hint as regards John Wallis's infamous shall-will distinction was that the distinction is very clear once apprehended, although it is likely to be disregarded by persons who have not had "the advantage of early intercourse with educated English people--I mean English in blood and breeding." He regrets that Marsh opines that the distinction has at present no logical significance. Further, he claims the distinction is a "quibble" only

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"to persons too ignorant, too dull, too careless for its apprehension." Then follow seven pages of esoteric explanation and illustration that would tax the circuits of an IBM computer.[67] As for wholesomeness, "rubbers" and "gums" are unwholesome, "overshoes," wholesome.[68]

A brief glimpse into White's biography reveals his genteel credentials and a special quality of his life which add significantly to understanding him. He was born in 1821, the seventh descendant from John White, a follower of Thomas Hooker, and one of the founders of Cambridge and Hadley, Massachusetts, and Hartford, Connecticut. Richard Grant's merchant father was a prominent low church Episcopalian. White attended the grammar school at Columbia College, and at sixteen entered the University of the City of New York. He later became a literary critic of some note and substance, as well as a prescriber of grammar. All of his life he revered the memory of his forebears, especially one Tory grandfather, after whom he modeled himself. Although he was given to discussing regional usages of America, he traveled hardly at all in it. He visited the England he so venerated only once, when he was past 50. He never saw Europe. In his youth he had wanted desperately to be a musician and his father had forbidden this. In all his life he never had a good job. He worked as a clerk to support a large family. He detested New York in which he lived his entire life. His contemporaries represented him as a disagreeable, humorless snob, as a coxcomb and anglomaniac.[69] White's behavior in the light of this information suggests once again the neurotic energy of the mania for correctness.

In spite of White's popularity, or perhaps because of it, his thought is in no way remarkable as thought. He was, moreover,

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very unskilled in philology and linguistics. (He is, however, said to have had extraordinary aesthetic sensibility.) His crucial contribution to correctness was his deliberate attempt to introduce consciousness into linguistic behavior, which he himself acknowledged as normally an " . . . unconscious and indirect effort." If the judgment of Hempel, or of modern linguists such as Francis, Marckwardt or Lloyd, is to be accepted, this consciousness is what has laid the heavy hand of repression across the pens of America.

Richard Grant White's only consistent antagonist in the public eye was a fellow genteel figure, Fitzedward Hall. Hall did not exert much influence in his special role, but he was applauded from time to time either as a quibbler with White or as a corrector in his own right.[70] Hall is, however, important intellectually for the reason that he seems to bridge the gap between the earlier romantic ideas and the growing ideas of natural science. The nature of his thought can be captured in a review essay in which he questions the idea of a necessarily "retrogressive English."[71] For his major premise he goes back to the romantic notion that language always undergoes change which is not necessarily corruption or retrogression. In his next step the naturalism begins to come in the form of a cyclical theory of development: A language springs from chaos; slowly attains an organized form, and then becomes disintegrated. This is a language's "natural history" which operates under the diverse influences of intellect, morality, politics, and aesthetics, acting gradually or abruptly. At a given stage of its existence, then, a language reflects the people who use it. It is always provisional, a passing fashion, never a finality. "No expression, therefore, is good merely because it is old; and no expression is bad merely because it is new." Therefore, as an aid to language we should

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only encourage sound education and the cultivation of good taste. The speech of our forefathers was part of an organic whole that harmonized with all its accompaniments. Our speech is a part of a different organic whole, " . . . which we shall only move to discord, if we affect the diction of the past. Language develops healthily . . . silently controlled by the liberal culture of influential writers and speakers . . . it develops all but insensibly."[72] This genteel admixture of romanticism and naturalism did not really stand four-square behind the mania for correctness, although in practice Hall could prescribe with the best. Although Hall's thought may strike some as more attractive than White's dogmatic, simplistic snobbery, it is out of the mainstream of correctness.

The new intellectual leadership in America during the period of national integration was in a great measure responsible for the renewed vigor of the correctness doctrine in American life. The general condition of the culture favored such a development. The war had made for a new appreciation of restraint and discipline over individual assertiveness.[73] The story molded from the date of this study squares well with the story of the intellectual and social movements of the time.[74] This narrative of the aspiration for a sense of community in the nation, for the eschewing of diversity and conflict is echoed in the science, arts and manners of the Gilded Age. The high premium the new leadership of editors and schoolmen of the time placed on intellect and restraint in order to achieve and maintain social conformity and to tame the individual and make him responsible to the community signals once again the flow of puritan morality into American life. It is hard to think of a clearer secular manifestation of "holy watchfulness" than the behavior of a Richard Grant White.

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For the social changes of the period, urbanization, industrialization, and the broadening of education, the data provide answers only for education, which was an important arm of the genteel cultural apparatus. Consequently, the role of the school in propagating the doctrine of linguistic conformity was undoubtedly major, inasmuch as this instution was clearly the focus of the entire movement of linguistic uplift.

Finally, it should be added that if the new leadership added anything new to the doctrine of correctness, it was the element of anxiety, as for example exhibited by the thinking of G. P. Marsh. The doctrine in the age of consolidation became nervous, neurotic even; it became a mania.

The art museums, the graduate schools, the professional schools and organizations--these were genteel tools which have become often impressive monuments to the genteel tradition in America. The doctrine of correctness was also a major genteel tool.

It has become not only a monument to a tradition but a continuing force in American life.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE PRESCRIPTIVE NOTION: THE 20TH CENTURY

Despite the modern desire to be easy and casual, Americans from time to time give thought to the language they use--to grammar, vocabulary, and gobbledygook. And as in other issues they divide into two parties. The larger, which includes everybody from the proverbial plain man to the professional writer, takes it for granted that there is a right way to use words and construct sentences, and many wrong ways.

Against this majority view is the doctrine of an embattled minority . . . . They are the professional linguists, who deny that there is such a thing as correctness.

Wilson Follett,
"On Usage, Purism and Pedantry"

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The 20th century witnesses a spewing forth of linguistic fact and theory unmatched by any other time in history. For the first time, the United States leads in this intellectual activity. The contributions of elite corps of investigators led by Bloomfield, Fries, Smith and Trager, and Chomsky are dazzling and remarkable. But this story, if never completely pulled together, can be found recorded accurately and completely among the pages of scores of textbooks, studies, and articles.

An aspect of the story of 20th century linguistic development that is uncommon and remarkable and needs comment is the disunion between 20th century linguistic attitudes and 20th century linguistic fact and theory. The point is that attitudes do not reflect either the scholarly efforts and consequences in the field of linguistics nor the intellectual spirit of the 20th century, but continue in the 20th century to accord with the linguistic and general culture of the 19th century.

The 20th century in linguistics is the move away from traditional 18th century notions and 19th century historical emphasis into the scientific and relativistic "structural" linguistics, and finally, at the present time, into transformational theory. Each of these two modern developments, although contrasting fundamentally in aims, methods, and consequences, eschew prescriptivism. Yet, the evidence of this study shows that the prescriptive notion remains dominant in the consciousness of the large majority of intelligent and educated people to this day.

Thus, the pattern produced in the 19th century--prescriptivism challenged by descriptivism--emerges again just as strongly and clearly, as if it were culturally inherited. What is curious is that this configuration exists against the powerful contrary and corrosive force of relativism and the scientific ethic of the 20th century. The agent

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of this singular continuity of pattern would appear from the evidence to be the school.

Of course, the issue of science enters linguistic study before the 20th century. Obviously the Darwinian controversy introduces the concept. But one should beware of equating the mere use of the word "science" as it was often used in the 19th century with the practice of science or with scientific attitudes as they evolve in the 20th century and as they are referred to in this chapter. Dwight Whitney,[75] the 19th century's most theoretically advanced American linguist, is a good example of a scholar who used the term "science" merely to denote a systematic listing of data with which one could more clearly explain the standard rules.[76] Science was for this great student of language no more than a tool for gaining order and precision in expression of traditional knowledge and materials, not a method of generating new knowledge.

Another great linguist, an English contemporary of Whitney's, who used science in the 20th century way referred to in this chapter, was Henry Sweet.[77] Like Whitney he made careful observations of the data, but unlike Whitney he let these observations lead him on by means of rigorous inference to new statements about language. Charles Hartung[78] has illustrated this difference succinctly by comparing the two philologists' treatment of "It is me," a linguistic shibboleth of the time. Whitney says of it: "Careless and inaccurate speakers . . . often use such expressions as <u>it is them</u>, <u>it was us</u>, <u>if it were her</u>,: and in the case of <u>it is me</u> the practice has become so common that it is even regarded as good English by respectable authorities."[79] Sweet says of it:

> I confine myself to the statement and explanation of facts, without attempting to settle the relative correctness of

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> divergent usages. If an "ungrammatical" expression such as It is me is in general use among educated people, I accept it as such, simply adding that it is avoided in the literary language.[80]

Thus, Sweet will admit inferences that his observations will support, even if contrary to the normative system. This behavior marks Sweet as a clear 20th century mind, and in the area of grammar it is very difficult to find an American counterpart at this time. It is Sweet's meaning for the term "science" as applied to linguistic study and linguistic attitudes that the 20th century has come to stand for. With the rise later of structural linguistics, linguists define their body of knowledge to accord with the intentions and methods of behavioral science in general.[81] (Presently, of course, the transformationalists are turning the scientific world on its ear by successfully challenging the behavioristic principles with the re-introduction of intuitive knowledge into the linguistic body of knowledge.) Therefore, the conflict between Whitney and Sweet is important in two ways. For one thing it signals the shift from the enlightened 19th century to the enlightened 20th century in language attitudes; for another, it defines a conflict that will continue in language attitudes to this day and which takes on a specific significance in American culture.

Since grammar would seem to be influenced by the general intellectual climate, it would seem then that the 1890's, science aside, would be more receptive to a descriptive doctrine of language with the implications of diversity, change, and freedom than the earlier decades. John Higham in "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890's" discusses the period in terms of its three major intellectuals, James, Turner, and Wright, featuring the fact that their " . . . revolt against intellectual rigidities closely paralleled the assault in

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popular culture upon a confined and circumscribed life."[82]

This period marks a transition in American intellectual life. By 1912 America is in another stage of development from the 1890's--a philosophical attack on all formal systems of thought, on all fixed and final thoughts,[83]--on all, that is, except formal systems of linguistic thought.

Very rarely is language included in this attack. Veblen,[84] to be sure, does include language in his criticism of systems and formal abstractions in a manner that still appears contemporary--his assumption that people behave irrationally, his alienation, his idealization of the scientific mind. One could exhibit authentic echoes from the 1970's.[85]

But Veblen was an exception in his perception. Although the development of structural linguistics has its roots in the tradition of progressive relativism through the influence of Franz Boas,[86] via Leonard Bloomfield, Edward Sapir, and others and grows out of that most relativistic of sciences, anthropology, rarely does the question of linguistic attitudes receive discussion outside of the narrow confines of linguistic treatises. Leonard Bloomfield talks about them in Language, but the discussion never becomes more public among intelligent and educated people as do the related ideas of Dewey, Holmes, Beard, Turner, and other progressives.

For example, the apparent analogy between Holmes' legal realism and linguistic realism (i.e., descriptivism) did not seize the imagination. Not even linguists, to judge from their discourse, were aware of the relationship. But as Holmes was saying in The Common Law that the life of law is not logic, but experience, so linguists were saying in effect in rebuttal to the prescriptive view--that language is not

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logic, but experience--convention. Just as Holmes asserted that judges should exercize restraint in trying to intervene in the operation of human affairs in general, so linguists were urging teachers to use restraint in interfering in the writing of students.

Although the progressive dilemma--the desire for freedom as against the desire for control--would trouble thoughtful people for much of the century, not until the Third International controversy in 1961 with its question of whether the existence and use of a locution makes it right, does the progressive dilemma become connected with language. But even then, so strong is the belief that language will degenerate without control, that the dictionary dilemma is not generally recognized as the progressive dilemma.

It is true that the commitment to the scientific method of 30's progressivism does finally lead to linguistic concern, but then only to concern with semantics within the "general semantics" movement.[87] The prescriptive-descriptive question does not get meaningfully discussed by non-linguists except very tangentially with regard to cultural pluralism and class consciousness.

In the other area of culture in which their history has tended to make Americans neurotic and irrational, sex, relativism and science, after considerable struggle, have finally had a significant effect. Witness the general acceptance of the work of Kinsey and Masters and Johnson, and the subsequent successful popularization of their ethic by Reuben in Everything You've Always Wanted to Know About Sex, but Were Afraid to Ask and by The Sensuous Woman. Compare this with the attitudes with regard to the Webster's Third International Dictionary or toward black English, and it is clear that Americans have been less rigid in sexual attitudes than in linguistic attitudes.

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Indeed, the central feature as regards the intellectual vis-a-vis linguistic attitudes is that in the 20th century a fierce tension--a split, really--develops between linguistically expert intellectuals and other intellectuals. Chapters Four and Five illustrate this split in detail.

Although the quantity of the challenge to formal correctness falls far beneath what one would expect in the 20th century, the quality of the challenge is as one would expect, reflecting continuities from the 19th century as well as changes from the 20th.

The romantic continuity is, of course, present. Franklin Baker discusses in 1912 the desired traits and behavior for English teachers:

> The teacher of English must know his language not only as an instrument, but also as a growth, as an organic thing with a long history behind it. Minute and full philological knowledge is not necessary: too much may even spoil a teacher's perspective; but ignorance of the field is a bad handicap. It is almost certain to go with narrow purism, with a mistaken certitude about things that are "right" or wrong in English.[38]

> He needs a fine sense for language: not for stilted, bookish English, but for the real, live, changing and growing language. I like the teacher who works with me to see the good even in slang, . . . I like him to like dialect, to be sensitive to its quaintness . . . .[89]

This romantic plea for the "free and spontaneous over pure correctness," for "naturalness and spontaneity matter vastly more than pedantic accuracy" are repeated occasionally in the 1920's--the period of these few quoted comments.[90]

About 1918 this romantic continuity begins to merge with a more academic protest, relating more to the growing scientific ethic. That year both Sterling Leonard[91] and George Krapp[92] published vigorous attacks on "purism"--both attacks urge a rigorous descriptive basis for grammatical study. Both, too, although related to the scientific awareness of the time, really owe more to the romantic-historical

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tradition of the 19th century. For it is Leonard Bloomfield's Introduction to the Study of Language[93] of 1914 that brings science to the center of linguistic research and to the center of the now venerable protest against linguistic prescriptivism. In terms of the history of ideas in America it is interesting to note that this work connects behaviorism with linguistic research.[94] Bloomfield does this by basing the 1914 work on the psychology of William Wundt, thus raising the mentalistic-mechanistic controversy with his argument that mechanism is the "necessary form of scientific discourse." Reading this again in 1971 in the middle of the storm raised by Noam Chomsky's successful reassertion of mentalistic principles evokes a certain irony. But of even more historical interest and surprise is the fact that this revolution in linguistic method and thought led by Bloomfield does nothing to disturb the continuity of expert linguistic protest against prescriptivism nor to change the need for protest. Bloomfield carries the protest right on in the 1914 study by attacking the notion of "better language" from a relativistic position.

Nor does the revolution against the behavioristic basis for language study on the part of Chomsky and the other transformationalists change the nature and the need for protest. It is true, of course, that Chomsky in Language and Mind charges that it is "ironic" that traditional grammar ("rational" grammar in his terms) should be accused of a Latin bias. He further claims that it has been "a complete misunderstanding"[95] that leads to the charge of prescriptivism. Very likely Chomsky is correct as regards the Port Royal grammarians and certain of their predecessors to whom he refers. But as regards the retired bishops and amateur philosophers of the British 18th century, who are responsible originally for the attitudes discussed in this study, Chomsky is not

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correct. As a result today's transformationalist and his offspring must not only operate with a ". . . self-conscious opposition to a descriptive tradition that interpreted the task of the grammarian to be merely that of recording and organizing the data of usage . . . ," but also with an opposition to the modern residue of prescriptivism. Chomsky terms it merely " . . . a confusion of philosophical grammar with the effort to teach better manners to a rising middle class."[96]

Paul Postal, a transformationalist colleague of Chomsky's, states it with more detail:

> Prescriptive grammar, virtually by definition, involves resistance to the never-ending process of linguistic change. The baseless assumption behind this resistance is that we are headed for a breakdown in communication unless linguistic change is opposed by the guardians of the language. And this assumption, groundless though it may be, dominates much popular discussion of grammar and usage both within the schools and without, and even the most obvious evidence to the contrary does not seem to shake this false view . . . . Prescriptive grammar tends to assume implicitly that human language is a fragile cultural invention, only with difficulty maintained in good working order. It fails to recognize that language is an innate attribute of human nature.
>
> Prescriptive grammar is thus not very much concerned with the nature of language as such, nor with the nature of English in particular. It is interested in "correct English . . ."[97]

Postal goes on to state that the interest of transformational grammar is in:

> . . . the vast body of structural and syntactic principles which are common to <u>all</u> varieties of English rather than in the minor details which differentiate them. These details are what have occasioned so much argument and emotion within the framework of prescriptive grammar.[98]

It may be that many of the prescriptionists and some of the descriptionists dealt with in the first two chapters of this study--Cardell, Goold Brown, Rand, Buckham, and especially White--were struggling toward some such goal as described by Postal. Witness their attempts to apply intellect and logic to language, their interest in

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"higher laws." But their vision was clouded and forces in the society and culture led them to quibble about the "minor details" of the common alternatives in dialect and style found in every speech community, on the part of the prescriptionists, and to observe and codify, on the part of the descriptionists.

Significantly, the protest against prescriptivism is one of the few features that structuralism and transformational grammar have in common. A close examination of data about linguistic attitudes leaves no doubt why this should be so.

In 1961 Joseph Mersand published a book, Attitudes Toward English Teaching,[99] detailing the results of the questionnaire about linguistic attitudes received in early 1958 from 1250 educators, business executives, editors, librarians, publishers, legislators, and judges. Each group was asked appropriate questions about improvements, deficiencies, recommendations covering many aspects of English teaching.

The result revealed that prescriptive correctness had a hold on the minds of this population to an astonishing degree.

> In the contemporary discussions concerning the educational needs of our times, one frequently read the recommendations to "return to the fundamentals," "more grammar," "greater insistence upon correctness" and the like.[100]

> It is obvious from these . . . criticisms that those who have been in contact with large numbers of employees in business and industry have noticed deficiencies in grammar. These criticisms are not new in the history of the teaching of English in America and some of the recent statements might easily be paralleled by others of 50 and 75 years ago.[101]

For the most conclusive evidence of the cultural dominance of the prescriptive tradition in America in the 20th century one has only to examine the attitudes revealed by the last two chapters of this study.

Unlike the general intellectual and social climate of the period, an examination of the articles and books having to do with English

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teaching and with language attitudes across the breadth of the 20th century reveals the soundness of the often stated charge that: "What passes for instruction in the native language is said to perpetuate the authoritarian viewpoint and Latinesque descriptions of 18th century grammarians, and to be out of touch with subsequent thinking and scholarship."[102]

For example, if one reads the English Journal for this century one finds that generally correctness is king, in overt terms in earlier years and in more covert forms in later years. There is, of course, as we have seen, always the challenge being put forth by those influenced by the science of linguistics but, as subsequent chapters will establish, the challenger never becomes champion.

One striking feature of 20th century attitudes as expressed in the periodical literature of the time is the strong continuity of genteel notions and apparatus. Genteel themes and motives sound again and again in the rhetoric in articles about English usage and remedy for it. " . . . personal culture has not kept pace with our material advancement."[103] "Civilization is conditioned by language."[104]

> The impulse to correct, which is natural, and is very strong in some teachers, is good only when, like other natural impulses, it is properly regulated. . . . I am far from arguing against rigorous correction at intervals; but the wise and sympathetic teacher is likely to suppress something like five out of six impulses to chastise a fault . . . .[105]

In 1912 in the English Journal appears an article entitled, "Wanted: A Higher Standard of Speech." In it Mary A. G. Mitchell writes of her concern for the non-application of the "rules of correctness" by "pupils." The " . . . striking neglect of these . . . rules shows itself in speech of the youth of the whole American continent."[106] This genteel writer laments that, "It is a matter of supreme indifference

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to him [the pupil] whether it is more correct to say, 'I shall be happy' or 'I wish I were there.'" After three pages of such detailed laments, she finds no answers, and must close pathetically with the question: "Is there no way of inculcating a necessity for better speech?"

Others of the latter day gentility at least profess to know the causes of the low standards. For example, Theodora C. Cox, in "Some Causes of Bad English in the United States,"[107] cites the "influence of locality and associates" in addition to the usual bad teaching. Many students, she notes, are "dependent on servants for companionship in homes where parents speak 'good English.'" Many also, "play with the ignorant and the street Arab, and . . . hang around the haunts of the professional loafer. Thus they absorb several dialects, slang and profane speech. What can a teacher do . . . against all of these forces . . . ?"[108]

Another excellent example of the genteel spirit is contained in the presidential address delivered before the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English in Chicago in 1913[109] by Fred Newton Scott, an English professor at the University of Michigan. Scott blames newspapers for the bad English of students. He also faults newspapers for "filthy stories," and "brutal and suggestive pictures" that "fill the house with violence, uproar and disorder."

There is in the early years of the century the creation of much genteel-like apparatus which illustrates the continuity of the 19th century mentality. One of the most energetic arms of this apparatus was the American Speech Committee of the Chicago Women's Club.[110] Among the activities of the committee was a survey of "attitudes of different sections of the Chicago public with regard to the standard

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of speech in daily life," and a survey "to see what was being done in schools, "to raise the standards of American speech." There can be little doubt of the genteel motives of these activities when one encounters rhetoric of the typical sort which follows:

> A love and respect for language, our own language, can be made one of the great forces working toward solidarity of the American people. The mixture of many nationalities has produced a splendid race. Its language as well as its institutions must be safeguarded.[111]

Similar puritan-genteel rhetoric was associated with Better Speech Week, a movement of the 20's national in scope in which "many thousands of schools took part."[112] "The leaders of this movement have realized that Better Speech Week is but a beginning, and that this path of linguistic righteousness is as steep and difficult as such straight and narrow paths are wont to be."

A similar apparatus to the Better Speech Week and the American Speech Committee of the Women's Club were the many "Better English Clubs" which grew up in high schools around the country.[113]

It is clear, therefore, that there is an unusually strong puritan-genteel continuity in linguistic attitudes particularly manifest during the first quarter of the century. Some continuity is, of course, to be expected as in most historical patterns. Later it will be suggested that this particular genteel continuity may be significantly stronger than usual because with the historical conjunction of the broadening of public education and the growth of the genteel tradition in the latter half of the 19th century, the genteel tradition becomes strongly institutionalized in the schools. But for the moment, it is significant to note that it is during this period of strong expression of the genteel continuity that the National Council of Teachers of English formed in 1911, formed according to these genteel values.

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An editorial in the Chicago Record-Herald of December 4, 1911, notes:

> It is lamentable fact that the ability to use the English language correctly . . . is seldom found among young people who have passed through high schools. The formation of the National Council of Teachers of English is an attempt to remedy this deficiency . . . .[114]

Subsequent developments in the NCTE would seem to contradict this editorial, for the NCTE, beginning in the 20's, becomes the seeming leader for reform in English teaching, especially as regards usage. The NCTE sponsored the publication of four books which were attempts to present a more realistic and honest account of American English usage and to argue for a less prescriptive attitude in teaching. These were: Charles C. Fries, The Teaching of the English Language (1927); Sterling A. Leonard, Current English Usage (1932); Albert H. Marckwardt and Fred G. Walcott, Facts About Current English Usage (1938); and Fries, American English Grammar (1940).[115] The NCTE continues this practice of sponsorship of various publications, many devoted to the subject of reform of linguistic attitudes. Yet in a very real sense the editorial of 1911 was right and is right to this day.

The sense in which the editorial was and is right is that the NCTE has remained committed to the institution it has been trying to reform--drawing its members from the school, working within the existing structure of the school, responding to the values and norms of the school. Thus the English departments have been able to select and certify their own critics.

Two ways in which this institutional connection has reflected genteel origins and maintained genteel values can be seen first in the received notion that the inculcation of a "standard" dialect in students is necessary for their educational, social, and economic

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success, and, second, the connection can be seen in the devotion to the assumption that grammatical study is necessary to develop the writing and reading skills of students.

As regards the matter of standard English: this has been simply a classic case of co-optation strategy. During the middle years of the century when force of the arguments of linguists against the prescriptive notion became too strong for the school to effectively ignore, the school merely co-opted the linguistic position by replacing the "good" English concept with the "standard" English concept--this largely through the agency of the NCTE in a process so successful that many linguists joined the effort. Consequently, while the language of the confrontation changes somewhat, the same pattern with the same substance as in the 19th century remains.

The co-optation process and the continuity of the pattern is best illustrated by an analysis of the black English controversy of the 1960's, which is developed in detail in Chapter Five of this study.

The second way in which the configuration drawn by this study was maintained in the 20th century, ironically through the agency often credited (and condemned) for its seeming reform activities, was in the maintenance of the notion that students must study some kinds of grammatical system formally in order to become better writers and speakers of the language.

For many years this assumption seemed to flourish almost universally without the support of much evidence one way or another. It seems simply never to have been questioned, probably because the assumption fitted so nicely with the prevailing prescriptive doctrine. This seems remarkable in view of the lack of success that the school has had over the last 150 years in achieving the language norms it has sought.

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Schoolmen and the general public have certainly been aware of the uncommon failure of the prescriptive doctrine to achieve behavioral objectives. For the literature is full of the complaints and laments about the "bad" or "nonstandard" behavior of students. In fact, the cries are so consistent in both detail and pattern that one gets a frequent sense of deja vu in researching them.

In recent years, however, researchers have thrown doubt on the assumption. H. C. Meckel asserts that:

> Reviews of educational research . . . have continually emphasized that instruction in grammar has little effect upon the written language skills of pupils. The interpretation and curricular applications of this general conclusion have ranged from written composition to the position that formal grammar merits little or no place in the language arts curriculum.[116]

Transformation grammarians, including Chomsky, have emphasized the conclusion, as no other group of linguists before, that formal grammar is irrelevant to the acquiring of writing or other language skills. An excellent example is an article by Peter Rosenbaum[117] which includes an elaborate demonstration that normative behavior in the grammar class is silly. Rosenbaum bases his argument on transformational concepts--that to significantly affect a student's linguistic behavior, a teacher would have to change the student's deep structures and transformations, not merely his performance of the surface structure. He also incorporates the older argument that the normative modes of the classroom are often at odds with the discoveries of grammatical investigation and with the correct intuitive knowledge of the students.

Thus the pattern of the challenge continues--now incorporating the concepts and language of the latest linguistic theory against the normative--prescriptive--tendency of the school.

These two assumptions--the necessity of standard English and the necessity of formal instruction in grammar--that the NCTE exempted from

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criticism effectively explain why it is that the movement in the schools from traditional grammar, to structural grammar, to transformational grammar never has reflected in reality the revolutionary rhetoric of the movements--"Revolution in Grammar," "Linguistics: Revolution in Teaching, " "The New English." ~~The~~ continuing viability of the two assumptions explains why this movement from system to system has merely been the replacement of one orthodoxy for another orthodoxy. The continuing arguments about which system of grammar to use to talk about language has effectively delayed argument about basic assumptions of the school which could lead to genuine and radical change in attitudes and goals within the school and within the general culture.

Moreover, the maintenance of these two assumptions explains how the NCTE has been able to remain true to its genteel origin, and to be one agency for the continuity of the 19th century prescriptive pattern into the 20th century against heavily contrary cultural forces.

In order to show the clear and unquestionable existence in the 20th century of the same conflict of attitudes as was discovered in the 19th century, and in order to further analyze the basis for this conflict, the study now turns to a more microscopic view of the two most important linguistic controversies of the 20th century: the Third International controversy, dealt with next in Chapter Four; and the black English controversy, dealt with finally in Chapter Five.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONTROVERSY

It is kind of a Kinsey Report in linguistics.

The Rt. Rev. Richard S. Emrich

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The persistence of the prescriptive attitude in the 20th century mind is probably best manifested in the controversy that raged in public print and private debate during 1961 and 1962 following publication of Webster's Third New International Dictionary.[118] The dictionary was met with nearly universal disapproval in the newspaper and magazine press, as well as in scholarly and professional journals. The counter-attack from professional linguists and lexicographers provided a most intensely focused and bombastic replay of the prescriptive-descriptive conflict that developed previously in the 19th century.

The Third was a product of the structural school of linguistics, a signal of that school's firm establishment among professionals after a long and bitter struggle, and probably the apogee of the movement, after which comes the descent as transformational notions ascend to dominance. At any rate, the Third is the structural school's clearest exposure to the educated and intelligent general public, whose attitudes about language owe so much to the traditional-prescriptive monopoly in the school system.

Philip Gove, Editor-in-Chief of the Third, in his many published explanations and defenses of the dictionary[119] usually bases his case on the following five principles, all basic concepts of structural linguistics:

1. Language changes constantly
2. Change is normal
3. Spoken language is the language
4. Correctness rests upon usage
5. All usage is relative

Adherence to these five principles produced innovations in the Third which can be seen by examining the violent reaction in the press

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when Webster's Third was published in the fall of 1961.

On September 7th the New York Times contained a report of the Third's appearance. The report characterized the format of the Third as a "popularization." Features having to do with the prescriptive-descriptive tension which the report singled out for mention included the fact that instead " . . . of offering a predominantly classical quotation to show the use of words, the work is sprinkled with 200,000 quotations chosen from contemporary sources."[120] It listed many of the contemporary sources, including Ethel Merman, Mickey Spillane, Corey Ford, newspapers and magazines, the Maine Hunting and Trapping Code, the Police Gazette and, "even a TransWorld Airlines timetable." It made special note of the use of the famous madam and author Polly Adler as a source for "shake," as in "there is no shaking off the press." The report ended with the note that the use of "ain't" is "defended," as the report termed it, by the Third as "used orally in most parts of the U.S. by cultivated speakers."

The same day a report based upon a United Press International release ran in the Chicago papers with a lead featuring the inclusion of "ain't" in the Third.[121] Similar articles based upon the same release appeared in many other cities as well. Probably this helped to fix this one item, ain't, as a principal rallying point for critics, inasmuch as it is perhaps the most taboo locution on the traditionalist's list of proscriptions. The same item also brought up another issue: the sanction of sentence-ending prepositions, noted by the Third as being used, " . . . by speakers on all educational levels and by reputable writers." Other articles fixed upon the reductions in the Third of status labels.[122] The Third uses only a very few "non-standard" and "sub-standard" labels on the grounds that in most cases

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the determination of such status is extremely relative. It was a concession for the Third to use these even as sparingly as it does, because of the evidence which indicates the absence of a standard dialect in the American speech community. But because the editors meant by "standard" the cultivated social dialect, which is the most homogeneous of all the social dialects, and because of the high degree of homogeneity of all dialects in the United States, this limited use of the two labels was able to function without any great dissonance. Prescriptive critics, however, lamented the dropping of "colloquial," which was dropped by the Third because, "It is impossible to know whether a word out of context is colloquial or not."[123]

Thus the controversy began with emphasis on the inclusion in the dictionary of many locutions—"ain't," "irregardless"--which a prescriptionist would bar as "bad usage," i.e., in violation of the 18th century "rules" derived from Latin and logic. The Third included them because they are widely used by English speakers. Critics were also initially stirred by the use of contemporary people without cultivated literary credentials as sources of usage.

But very shortly the jolt caused by these rather minor and miniscule bits of an enormous product led to more thoughtful and sometimes penetrating criticisms. By no means the most thoughtful but at least the first of these appears in an editorial comment in the Washington Sunday Star on September 10, 1961.[124] It begins by reflecting on the "startling revisions" displayed by the Third International Edition. " . . . Revisions likely to shock more than a few of us who happen, for better or worse, to be traditionalists congenitally opposed to change just for change's sake." The editorialist allows that the most shocking thing in the whole book is the "rather respectful" view of

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"ain't." "This is certainly a far cry from the dictionary's 1934 edition, which bluntly--and correctly, in our view--brands 'ain't' as a 'dialectal' and 'illiterate' expression employed by people of the fringes of polite society." Gentility ever once again. But the writer is not content to dwell with the mere surface issue of how "ain't" " . . .this basically unpleasant, unnecessary and grammatically gauche word has been more or less legitimatized by the Merriam-Webster people." This merely leads him to an even more depressing notion:

> Alas, how unstern and almost unscholarly scholarship seems to have become. Small wonder that our English-speaking world, when it thus tolerates the debasement of its language, is having trouble with creatures like beatniks--not to mention Nikita Khruschev and his kind--who are developing a style of writing that may best be described as literary anarchy, to use a polite word.

David Glixon, writing in the Saturday Review, also sees the descriptive nature of the Third as symptomatic of a more serious cultural evil: "It would seem that permissiveness, now on the wane in child-rearing, has caught up with the dictionary makers. Having descended from God's throne of supreme authority, the Merriam folks are now seated around the city desk, recording like mad."[125] "What's the point," asks Sydney J. Harris in the Chicago Daily News,

> in any writer's trying to compose clear and graceful prose, to avoid solecisms, to maintain a sense of decorum and continuity in that magnificent instrument, the English language, if that peerless authority, Webster's Unabridged, surrenders abjectly to the permissive school of speech.
>
> Relativism is the reigning philosophy of our day, in all fields, not merely in language, but in ethics, in politics, in every field of human behavior. There is no right or wrong--it is all merely custom and superstition to believe so. If the majority behave a certain way, that is the way to behave. Popularity gives sanction to everything.
>
> Our attitude toward language merely reflects our attitude toward more basic matters. It is not terribly important whether we use "ain't," or "like" instead of "as"--except as symptoms of a general decay in values. If everything is a matter of taste

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> and preference and usage, then we are robbing ourselves of all righteous indignation against evil. For what is evil, in the modern cannon, except somebody else's equally valid conception of "good."[126]

Thus the question of morality, or evil, is introduced in this interesting and in manyways highly insightful commentary (whether one agrees with his thrust or not) by Harris, a drama critic and columnist.

These views of the dictionary's innovations as merely symptoms of a basic cultural or moral malaise are not isolated. Perhaps a perusal of the ultimate of these somber views should conclude the look at them. It appeared in a review of the Third International which appeared in the Detroit News. It was written by the Right Reverend Richard S. Emrich, the Episcopal Bishop of Michigan, a man well known around Detroit for his "liberal" social attitudes and his efforts in behalf of racial harmony and in working to solve other contemporary social ills. The very fact that the book review editor should choose to give the dictionary to the bishop to review reveals something very interesting about the editor's linguistic attitudes. The News at the time had a large stable of reviewers available, including at least one linguist. Emrich begins with very somber rhetoric:

> If a sentry forsakes his post and places an army in danger, the penalty is severe. If a guardian ceases to guard and neglects his duty to children, there are few who would not condemn. If a great dictionary forsakes its post as the guardian of our language, how can one avoid disappointment? . . . the editor has failed to see that one cannot in this life avoid taking sides: one cannot be neutral. In the contest between good language and poor language, the new dictionary has cheapened the language. What led the editors to abandon standards and judgments? If men assume the responsibility of publishing a dictionary (a trust from Noah Webster), do we not expect guidance, though imperfect, in good English? Because language changes and new words are added, does it follow that standards do not exist? Cannot a language, like everything else, be weakened and corrupted? . . . Dean Inge of St. Paul's, London, was known as the "gloomy Dean" because he had no optimistic illusions about the modern world. He did not believe that what was new was necessarily

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> good. He was one of the first to attack bolshevism at a deep level. He said that traditions, disciplines, and standards were necessary in politics, but that the bolsheviks were foisting on the world the naive belief that a bright future could be built by firing squads, mass trials, propaganda, etc. (Castro). Old disciplines and standards may be discarded. "Nonsense!" said the "gloomy Dean."
>
> The bolshevik spirit, he said, is to be found everywhere, not just in Russia. Wherever our standards are discarded in family life, the care of the soul, art, literature, or education, there is the bolshevik spirit. Wherever men believe that what is, is right; wherever they discard discipline for an easy short-cut, there is bolshevism. It is a spirit that corrupts everything it touches. . . . with all of its virtues and prodigious labor and excellence of printing the greatest of all American dictionaries has been corrupted at center. The greatest language on earth has lost a guardian.[127]

And so the gloomy Bishop takes as alarming a view as possible in America at this time and connects the descriptivism of the Third International with Castro and communism, not to mention Kinsey.

Despite the cultural calamity seen by this set of journalistic commentators, there are two other editorial documents in particular that serve to keep the controversy moving and, indeed, to give it new impetus. These both appear in the fall of 1961 in widely read publications of great prestige as opinion leaders. The New York Times took an uncommon interest in the controversy and was clearly the leader of the opposition as far as column inches and public credibility go. Sledd and Ebbit include seven items from the New York Times in the eight months between September 7, 1961, and February 8, 1962. The central piece is an editorial which appeared on October 12, 1961,[128] and which was quoted, referred to, and alluded to repeatedly by other writers and other publications for the next few months of the hottest part of the controversy. There is little in the editorial which was original, but it was clearly taken as definitive by many people, both lay and intellectual. It said simply that, "Webster's has, it is apparent, surrendered to the

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permissive school that has been busily extending its beachhead on English in the schools." It saw this development as "disastrous" because the publication of a "say-as-you-go" dictionary could only serve to accelerate the deterioration of the "art of clear communication" which is patently clear in the country, especially among students. Then the typical appeal to authority: "Webster's is more than just a publishing venture: for generations it has been so widely regarded as a peerless authority on American English as to become almost a public institution." Therefore, the editorial continued, "the publishers have failed in their public responsibility." Then came the new element in the editorial, an element that would become in countless other editorials a coda of the protest:

> We suggest to the Webster editors that they not throw out the printing plates of the Second edition. There is likely to be a continuing demand for it: and perhaps the edition can be made the platform for a new start. . . . a new start is needed.

The other editorial of great influence took the same tack. Said the editorial in Life of October 27, 1961:[129] "We're not opposed to progress, but we'll keep Webster's Second edition around awhile for little matters of style, good English, winning at Scrabble and suchwise." Lincoln or Churchill, Life said, could not have modeled their immortal speeches on a book so "lax."

Apparently, the Times people read their own editorials and even take them seriously, for on January 4, 1962, the following directive was issued to the staff of the New York Times:

> A regional correspondent inquires whether the appearance of Webster's Third New International Dictionary will affect our style. The answer is no. Editors representing the news, Sunday and editorial departments have decided without a dissent to continue to follow Webster's Second edition for spelling and usage. Webster's Third will be the authority only for new, principally scientific, words. Two copies of that edition are available in the news department.[130]

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There were, of course, voices in support of Webster's Third, but they were in a decided minority. The editor of Webster's Third, Philip B. Gove, took an active, articulate and aggressive role in its defense. His first, longest, and most detailed defense appeared in a G. & C. Merriam Company house organ, Word Study, which is widely distributed to teachers in schools and colleges nationwide. The defense appeared only a month after the publication of the Third, but even then the strong opposition was clear. Gove, in this piece, however, restricts his comments to teachers. He tells them in the long article, in effect, that linguistic science is no longer a theory, but an idea whose time has come. He very patiently and clearly reviews the linguistic facts that inspired the dictionary and argues their firm and accurate establishment as scientific fact. He especially warns teachers of the fallacy that there is some sanction for language behavior other than the actual linguistic behavior of native speakers of the language. He again warns them of planting in their students' minds the persistent notion that the language of the great majority of speakers is somehow corrupt or degenerate. He tells them that the result of this notion is "linguistic uncertainty, self-consciousness, and timid commonplaceness."[131] He reviews the scientific knowledge and tools available to the makers of the Third which were not available to the editors of Webster's Second, as, for example the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada, which showed that several pronunciations, for example, may lack prestige in one region and be acceptable in another region. He concludes by noting that a dictionary maker should not scorn sprachgefuhl, but that he should " . . . have no traffic with guesswork, prejudice, or bias or with artificial notions of correctness and superiority." The dictionary " . . . must be descriptive and not prescriptive."

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But since this defense was addressed primarily to teachers as the readers of Word Study, and since he was probably feeling the heat of the Times and Life editorials, he wrote vigorous letters to both publications, which printed them in their "letters" columns. In the longer letter to the Times Gove scorns the editorial for creating artificial sentences from items in Webster's Third ("A passel of double-domes at the G. & C. Merriam Company joint . . . have been confabbing and yakking . . . ," etc.) and passing them off as "approved" by Webster's Third. This was a very common bit of humor indulged in by editorial writers during the controversy. Gove calls the contrived paragraphs by the Times a "monstrosity" that " . . . hits no mark at all." He says similar paragraphs could be prepared from formal literary language, that each of the words used in the paragraph have in some context standard status, that all the words used would not in English occur together. He then cites evidence of "standard" context for many of the words that the Times made fun of.

He reminded the Times that that newspaper was itself a source: " . . . no other daily newspaper has been more consistently read or more frequently cited," (700 times in Webster's Third) for the Webster's Third, and " . . . that as long as your own staffers are allowed to express themselves in their own vigorous independent style, they will be exemplifying viable up-to-date English that no prescriptive rules can interfere with." He asks the Times to, " . . . talk sense to the American people. . . . the ultimate arbiters of our linguistic standards should not be urged to look back to artificial precepts of a bygone age. They must accept linguistic facts."[132]

He tells the editors of Life that for the dictionary " . . . to attempt to prescribe the language would be like Life reporting the

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news as its editors would prefer it to happen."[133]

There were also a few journalistic defenses. Norman E. Isaacs[134] was the first, when he chided the "erudite gentlemen" of the New York Times for their editorial attacking Webster's Third, saying it was unlikely they could win the argument because they didn't have the facts on their side. Ethel Strainchamps in the Saint Louis Post Dispatch wrote a sympathetic review of the dictionary, and displayed an understanding and acceptance of descriptive notions.[135]

But what of some of the other professions concerned with language? What was their reaction to Webster's Third? A look at the various professional journals which reviewed the publication reveals, if anything, a reaction even more strongly negative than in the newspapers. Some of the individual reactions were interesting and some even startling. Business Week, under the title, "Webster's Wayout Dictionary," called Webster's Third a "businessman's nightmare" because "A one-product company that pours millions into research but brings out a new model only about four times each century has just stuck its neck out with a version that could easily prove 20 years ahead of its market."[136] Business Week suggested that the dictionary "might well stir up a controversy once it's in the hands of academicians," because most dictionaries since Dr. Jonson have been prescriptive. The review reports, in this regard, that Merriam's competitors, " . . . marvel at the boldness of the move," and that some felt that it might cost the company part of its traditional market. They report one "major competitor" as saying that, "What they did was right, but they may have done it 20 or 30 years too soon. They're staking their reputation against a lot of research among academicians who control the school markets." About the controversy Business Week and the "major competitor" were certainly right,

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but they were a bit off on their prediction as to the locus of that controversy. Academicians who disliked the dictionary, and they were legion, had only to sit back and let the press mount the attack. There was resentment enough there for everybody. Indeed, it must have proven to many academics, who often suspect the popular press' low values, a reassurance to see the press fight so diligently for such high minded principles as linguistic punctilio.[137]

Science actually turned on the linguists and lexicographers who were operating in its name and with its principles. It is difficult to tell the review in this journal from dozens of others that appeared in the New York Times and other enemy jeers except for the concern for scientific and technical terms (which come after the concern over the inclusion of "irregardless" and "ain't" and the dropping of the "colloquial" label). The last paragraph of the Science review is startling even though it is predictable given the data of this study. It reveals the strength of the prescriptive notion even among some of those whose professional training would most preclude it. Perhaps it is a piece of concrete evidence of the really striking lack of effect of 20th century science and technology culturally in terms of the prescriptive linguistic notion. The last paragraph reads:

> The editor [of Webster's] has paid his debt to science more fully than to general culture. His working rule that accuracy requires a dictionary to state meanings in terms in which words are in fact used, not to give editorial opinion on what their meanings are does better for technical terms than for English in general. We hope the next edition will distinguish more sharply and with more discrimination between illiterate and literate usage, both in speech and in writing.[138]

It is clear from the review that the writer, Graham Du Shane, and whatever portion of the scientific community's attitude he represents, simply does not take seriously the notion that language or

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lexicography can be approached scientifically. In his review he notes that Webster's Third reports "ain't" as "used orally in most parts of the U. S. by many cultivated speakers." Du Shane says, "This we doubt," and that is all he says. When one scientist doubts an assertion of another scientist's, he discusses the evidence for the assertion. Du Shane dismisses the assertion out of hand. He apparently does not accept it, or even perceive of it, as a scientific inference.

The review in the Library Journal was a bitter attack on the Third from another unlikely source. Its judgment: "Indispensable for its new . . . material, deplorable for its wholesale abridgments--as well as its obfuscation of the boundaries between prestige and non-prestige usages . . . ."[139] The reviewer refuses to accept the premise that a dictionary should be descriptive on the grounds that, " . . . the great mass of dictionary users want and need a dictionary to prescribe for them." It is interesting that the review should link this "want" and "need" to upward mobility. "Enlightened teachers," it says:

> no longer seek to uproot everyday . . . language and plant elevated usage in its place but rather to cultivate the pupil's ability to switch with ease from one to the other--that is to promote the social mobility that goes with true democracy. Surely it is misguided egalitarianism, then, to intersperse forms belonging to various levels and regions in such a way that no one usage appears to have an official status.[140]

This appeal to the sacredness of upward mobility and the necessity of "standard" or elevated usage to achieve the same becomes very familiar in theme in the school's defense of prescriptivism, as Chapter Five will demonstrate. The review chooses to illustrate the point with the fact that the dictionary lists the pronunciation of "bird" as occurring both with and without the /ɝ/ coloring. The review notes that the latter pronunciation still has prestige in some "southern circles," but, "Today it is shunned like the plague by nearly all New

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Yorkers who identify themselves with the educated." This suggests a certain regional bias on the part of the reviewer.

A leading journal of yet another group of professionals who work with language came out four square against Webster's Third when the American Bar Association Journal announced that, "The New Webster's will be of no use to us; . . . it will not, for us at least, supplant the Second edition."[141] The review made a long analogy with currency and used the notion of Gresham's Law against the Third. It pointed out that Noah Webster had been trained as a lawyer, practiced the art, and therefore, " . . . well understood the importance of exact language and good usage." It lamented that in his name, "A serious blow has . . . befallen the cause of good English." The Journal, as consequence, joined in, " . . . what seems to be the general feeling is that [the] abdication of responsibility for the standards of language is deplorable."

The only professional linguist to attack Webster's Third, at least in public print, was Mario Pei.[142] In the New York Times Book Review[143] he meets the question of usage with his own question: "Whose usage? That of J. F. Kennedy--or that of Joe Doakes?" His point is that the usage principle and the informality principle could lead to "vulgarity." But even Pei, who is certainly no descriptionist, grudgingly grants some measure of publication success for Webster's Third; for, "It is the closest we can get, in America, to the Voice of Authority." From the tone of that statement, from the capital letters, from the tone of the whole review, one gets the impression that Mario Pei longs for the values of other places, other times, but will live in this time and place if he has to.

While the reaction of professional journals was overwhelmingly negative, Editor & Publisher and the English Journal keep debate alive.

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Roy H. Copperud in Editor & Publisher called the opposition to Webster's Third, " . . . a flurry of nitwitted commentary."[144] The commentators " . . . whine that the new dictionary is guilty of 'permissiveness,' reflecting the wrong-headed though widely held--especially among journalists and high school teachers of English--conviction that the business of a dictionary is to lay down the law." I. Willis Russell, writing in the English Journal, a journal for high school English teachers, also advocates the position of Webster's Third, but he apparently does not see the locus of prescriptivism with teachers, as does Roy Copperud. For Russell says that, "It is unnecessary in this journal to belabor the point that a living language changes, as does the status of words and locutions. It will not be surprising, therefore, to find terms labeled one way in Webster's Second either labeled differently in Webster's Third or not at all."[145] If the evidence of this study and other studies is sound, Copperud is more near in his estimates of the attitudes of most of Russell's readers than Russell is. But Russell's is a clear, thoughtful, well documented defense of Webster's Third and of the descriptive orientation.

Most of the attacks dealt with so far in this chapter have not been thoughtful or well documented attacks. They have been, by and large, sincere, but visceral, emotional defenses of the status quo or, more frequently, laments of the corruption of modern thought. A great many have been imitative and unoriginal, following the theme and using the examples of such opinion leaders as the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Life. They were written, in the main by men who, however well informed in some areas of knowledge, knew little if anything about the history or nature of the English language. This is a rather strange statement to make about professional journalists, but

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it is patently true. (The same would also be a strange observation to make about teachers of English, but it is also true about them.) Moreover, either the operation of the daily press does not allow for much basic research or the temperament of the men who operate it does not, for not many of them bothered to check out empirically the evidence for Webster Third's position or for the individual entries in Webster's Third. They simply reacted in terms of the received attitudes in their heads. This must have seemed acceptable to them as it seems to have struck a responsive chord in the public, to have squared with the received attitudes in the public's mind. Thus one sees in reading these attacks a great deal of redundancy in both thesis and detail.

There were, however, some few attacks which were more thoughtful and original, and thus more powerful, if no less deeply felt. These appear later in the controversy, because they are in publications requiring longer and more careful presentation. They were written by men aware of the issues, and to whom the prescriptive notion was strong, and valid. These men could hold their own in an argument against very informed people. A discussion of two of these attacks should further illuminate the force of the prescriptive nocion in the 20th century in America as it is revealed in the Third International controversy.

Of the two critical articles to round out the discussion of the attacks, the ones that best meet these criteria of thoughtfulness, logic, and development are by Dwight McDonald in the New Yorker[146] and Wilson Follett in Atlantic.[147] Follett's has much about it of the outraged sputter, but is basically so clear and deeply felt so as to perhaps stand in company with McDonald's. But credit for the most determined, best reasoned, and most researched attack on Webster's Third should clearly go to Dwight McDonald. This is not to say that his critics did

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not find gaps in his research and flaws in his logic, as shall be shown here in part; it is only to say that critics and defenders alike would probably agree that his essay is the most worthy advocate of the prescriptive forces. Clearly it is the most determined.

The essay appeared first in the New Yorker and McDonald later expanded on it in the form of an answer to Patrick E. Kilburn, who attacked McDonald's New Yorker essay. Joining this colloquy with McDonald, Follett, and Kilburn, was James Sledd, the editor of Dictionaries and That Dictionary. This four way confrontation, though not the finale of the controversy, was the time when the flame of controversy burned brightest and most intensely.

In his New Yorker piece McDonald objects to nearly everything that other critics had objected to, except in a great deal more detail and with the buttressing of more research and thought. Rather than to rehash his and Follett's objections again, it is useful to organize the report of McDonald-Follett-Kilburn-Sledd around the three questions that McDonald presents as the essence of his argument, the final ground on which he will take his stand. His development of the three questions stands as a rather good brief for modern prescriptivism and the rejoinders of Kilburn and Sledd may sum up modern descriptivism. McDonald's three questions were: (1) Can a dictionary be descriptive and not prescriptive? (2) What is the nature of change in language? (3) What kind of authority, if any, should attempt to direct and control change?

As regards the first question: McDonald argues that if Gove had believed that there could have been a descriptive dictionary, he would not have used such usage labels as he did (sub-standard, non-standard, and slang). His reasoning is that no matter how descriptive these labels are to Gove, to "the rest of us" they are prescriptive because

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they "imply a value judgment." Follett makes a very similar point:

> Examination cannot proceed far without revealing that Webster's Third, behind its front of passionless objectivity, is in truth a fighting document. And the enemy it is out to destroy is every obstinate vestige of linguistic punctilio, every influence that makes for the upholding of standards, every criterion for distinguishing between better usages and worse. In other words, it has gone over bodily to the school that construes traditions as enslaving, the rudimentary principles of syntax as crippling, and taste as irrelevant.
>
> . . . the rock-bottom practical truth is that the lexicographer cannot abrogate his authority if he wants to. He may think of himself as a detached scientist reporting the facts of language, declining to recommend use of anything or abstention from anything; but the myriad consultants of his work are not to see him so. He helps create, not a book of fads and fancies and private opinions, but a Dictionary of the English language. It comes to every reader under auspices that say, not "Take it or leave it," but rather something like this: "Here in 8000 columns is a definitive report of what a synod of the most trustworthy American experts consider twentieth century. This is your language; take it and use it. And if you use it in conformity with the principles and practices here exemplified, your use will be the most accurate attainable by any American of this era." The fact that the compilers disclaim authority and piously refrain from judgments is meaningless: the work itself, by virtue of its inclusions and exclusions, its mere existence, is a whole universe of judgments, received by millions as the word from on high.[148]

Kilburn[149] answers McDonald's first question simply by saying the fact that "Dwight McDonald and his Dwightiots" read the descriptions of the dictionary as prescription doesn't make the dictionary prescriptive. He points to the "Explanatory Notes" of Webster's Third as the cure for this in that they contained detailed explanations of the principles and practices of the dictionary, including the intended meaning of the few status labels used. Sledd,[150] in his essay, adds that one reason for the Third International controversy was Gove's success in informing the public that some dictionaries, and most especially his, were not what they thought they were.

The second question asks about the nature of change, and brings from McDonald the stipulation that language does change:

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> . . . but there must be some brakes applied by those who know and care about the language, or else the change will be so fast and so dominated by the great majority who have other things to do besides worrying about good English that the result will be a jargon as cut off from the race's culture and traditions as the Pidgin English of the South Seas. There must be some people in a position of authority because of their skill or knowledge who will insist on standards even if they are called purists, pedants, and reactionaries. It is their job to make it tough for changes, so that the fittest will survive.[151]

He also in answering the second question comes to a very clear statement of the necessity of formal authority. He admits:

> . . . that . . . common usage is the chief determinant of change. But the process is not mindless and automatic, as some of the more far-out disciples of Structural Linguistics seem to think. It can be, and has been, hastened or retarded (or even completely scotched) by conscious actions taken by certain individuals who are looked up to by the lay community as--awful word--authorities. Until the masochistically modest Dr. Gove came along, lexicographers were prominent among such authorities.

Sledd, in answer, says that he doubts both the <u>can</u> and the <u>should</u> of McDonald's assertion that certain individuals can consciously control linguistic change, and that lexicographers should as a moral imperative. He cites his own studies in this area as well as his reading of the studies of others. Moreover, he labels McDonald's fear of English becoming like Pidgin as "imaginary," citing how well English has done for some centuries without conscious human control, as well as the fact that people who propose to control language are not <u>its most</u> informed students, and, finally, that the would-be controllers have never defined their ends for control.[152]

Kilburn asserts that the process of change is not "mindless and automatic;" "It is instead the result of a staggeringly complex interplay of a vast variety of linguistic pressures . . . ," among which are perhaps the prescriber's activities. What seems to upset the prescribers, continues Kilburn, is that lexicographers pay little attention to their prescriptions but observe closely their practice. "Mr. McDonald has

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not made his mark as a theoretician . . . but as a practicing writer. If he sincerely believes in a conservative theory of language, let him begin by writing formally. Let him eschew all slang terms, and preserve the purity of the tongue in his own writing. Example is much stronger than precept. But of course he will not . . . ."[153]

McDonald's third question of what kind of authority should direct and control change is very closely related to his second question. He argues that correctness cannot rest upon common usage, that instead it must rest upon " . . . the way words are used by those who have a special interest in the language: teachers, scholars, writers."[154]

Neither Kilburn nor Sledd have much to say in response to the third question, believing the discussion of the second question to have covered it largely. They both, however, state that McDonald's three questions do not adequately cover the ground that separates them from his position. Kilburn cites two fallacies in McDonald's presentation: McDonald's naive belief in a single "good English," and his fallacious belief that usage labels determine the status of a word. A word will have, claims Kilburn, a certain status in a certain situation, no matter how it is listed in a dictionary.[155]

Sledd's added point raises the question of the responsibility of reviewers. This question is extremely interesting in view of the nature of the conflict in the controversy between two groups of linguistic professionals, one which makes a living studying language, the other using it. Although each group is engaged professionally with the language, they seem at opposite poles in their ways of looking at it. The question also has some bearing on the role of prescription in the 20th century culture.

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Ethel Strainchamps, one of the very few journalists to favorably review Webster's Third, a few weeks after her review, when the full depth and vehemence of the opposition was fully apparent, wrote a commentary on this interesting paradox. She referred especially to the reviews in the Saturday Review, the New York Times, and Life.

> The Merriam-Webster editors must have known that most people are linguistically more conservative in theory than in practice. But modern writers, who are more free-wheeling with their language than any of their predecessors since Shakespeare, might have been expected to accept the consequences.[156]

The comment in the press on Webster's Third indicates, however:

> . . . that our writers are more modern in what they do than in what they think. They don't, in short, approve of their own uninhibited practice.

She charges that the writers of the critical editorials make it quite clear that they have an "egregious" misconception of what the role of a dictionary is and that they choose to disregard the problems of the readers of their own publications.[157]

She suggests that this ignorance and disregard based on prejudice about words is not as inexcusable an error as the critical editors' failure to do "the most elementary kind of research," this because they give evidence in their editorials that they have no idea, " . . . as to what is really printed between the covers of the old dictionary that they profess to treasure and use as a guide . . ."[158] and which they ask their readers [and in the case of the New York Times, its staff] to use in place of Webster's Third. In the remainder of her article she develops this point by showing how much of the language in the editorials would be proscribed by Webster's Second. For example, in the issue of Life that contained the editorial claiming that magazine would continue to use Webster's Second, Strainchamps found thirty usages proscribed by Webster's Second. All this, she concluded, only shows that

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the editorialists in the three cases, " . . . don't know what the real problems for dictionary editors are, nor what a good dictionary should be."[159]

Ethel Strainchamps makes no mention of how the critics of Webster's Third came by their prescriptive prejudices--prejudices so strong that they react without even elementary research into the substance of their concern--very curious behavior for publications of the record and prestige of these just indicated. Kilburn, too, is puzzled by it, " . . . except by attributing it to the thorough job of brainwashing we are subjected to by the schoolmarms in our formative years."[160] McDonald is not puzzled and gives a cogent answer, although it too suffers from the same ignorance of the nature of language and language change that leads him into his difficulties with his academic adversaries, Kilburn and Sledd. For McDonald the reason for the journalistic revulsion at Webster's Third is psychological:

> The language tells people who they are, since the past has formed the present; if a people loses contact too abruptly with its past, as in Soviet Russia and Red China today, it becomes disoriented, formless, anonymous. I think our violent reaction to Webster Three was partly because we thought it speeded up too much the normal process of language change by its overpermissive attitude. This made us uneasy because it threatened our sense of identity. Our language was being eroded under us and the rodents were just those we had assumed would be on the other side, namely the lexicographers. A "mystical reaction" perhaps--"emotional" might be more accurate--but one with a reasonable basis.[161]

In addition to giving a rationale for the "almost unanimous hostility of the lay press"[162] to Webster's Third, McDonald also makes a case for the superiority of journalists over scholars in terms of fitness for criticizing Webster's Third. "Normally," he says, "one would expect scholars to defend standards and journalists to be relatively indifferent, here the opposite is the case." He hazards that this has happened because the " . . . academic establishment has gone overboard

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for Structural Linguistics . . . ."[163] [an assertion contrary to the facts; structural linguistics and linguistics met with extreme hostility in universities and colleges in the 50's and 60's] The lay critics, McDonald argues, are on " . . . the firing line of actual usage since they make their living by writing for the public, are more aware of and concerned about the vulgarization of the language that is now going on in this country. Also, journalists are more worldly and cynical than scholars."[164]

Sledd, for his part, points out that Webster's Third is important, but that the controversy surrounding it is not an earth shaking issue.

> Between respect and disrespect, however, for integrity, experience, and learning, the difference is important. . . . when a reviewer sits down to an unabridged dictionary, he can only sample it, and much of the sample will be beyond him; on any given point, the chances are some hundred to one that the editors know more and had better advice than he knows or can give. The reviewer should remember these things. When he thinks he has turned up something wrong, he should examine his judgment and check his facts before saying so, and if he finally decides that the criticism is deserved, he should offer it modestly and in the consciousness that men's prosperity and happiness and the solvency of a great institution may depend on what he says.
>
> Mr. McDonald will apparently have none of these scruples. Whether or not the Third International is a good dictionary, I soberly maintain that his review of it is bad, and portentously bad, because it is disgraced by . . . ignorance and unfairness . . . .[165]

Sledd goes on to make several carefully documented and soundly reasoned direct charges against McDonald's qualifications as a reviewer of Webster's Third. He charges that McDonald is careless with facts, that he does not state his case against the dictionary fairly, that he was not familiar with established dictionary techniques, that he knew little about discussions of linguistic change, the nature of language or linguistic geography; that he misrepresented both Webster's Third and Second repeatedly, and that McDonald's ideas of good English are confused.[166]

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Sledd's case against McDonald's review is strong and convincing; and what he says about McDonald goes in spades for the other reviewers, since McDonald is clearly the best, most important, most credible, and most determined of all the "lay" critics. Even McDonald admits that the critics acted "emotionally"; it seems clear from the reviews that they acted without sufficient knowledge, research, and responsibility, as well. The reason for this is the point for this study.

Whether or not the Third International is a good, bad, or indifferent dictionary, the nature of the reaction of the press against it shows in clear, crystal form the strength of the prescriptive linguistic attitude in the mid-twentieth century. This must be connected with the strength of the same attitude in the educational institution of the culture which created this reaction both by what it does--inculcate the prescriptive attitude--and what it doesn't do--provide information about the nature of language.

Against the chance that the press reaction might be a kind of universal human reflex, it is instructive to examine the reaction of the British press to Webster's Third, which after all is an International dictionary of the English language.

A look at some dozen reviews appearing in British newspapers and periodicals during the controversy shows not one negative review, and only minor mention at all of the prescriptive-descriptive controversy, beyond the simple reporting of the controversy raging in the States. In an early review the Glasgow Herald accepts gracefully the descriptive nature of the dictionary, saying that American English is a rapidly evolving language, that:

> . . . all languages change and grow and change; even Johnson, who once had hoped that his dictionary should act as a fixative, acknowledged in a celebrated passage the vanity of such a wish . . . .

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> From such illusions Webster was always free; indeed he and his successors would regard the idea of trying to fix a language not simply with skepticism but abhorrence. American is a language changing faster than most; and the rapidity is actively cherised as a virtue.[167]

After reading the American reviews one would wonder by whom it is considered a virtue, but certainly here is a response of a different source. The review goes on to analyze how the dictionary reflects American culture, without further reference to the descriptive nature.

One review, by Randolph Quirk in the New Statesman, does find the lack of a more refined scheme or usage labels "rather regrettable," but negative comment is a less important feature of the review, and no hindrance to a favorable judgment, as Quirk concludes, " . . . that it is difficult to imagine in so compact a form so vast, so authoritative, and so up-to-date a body of information . . . ."[168] on the English language.

The Third International is reviewed favorably, sometimes glowingly, without reference to its descriptive nature in Books of the Month, the Cardiff Western Mail, the Scotsman, the Observer, the Manchester Guardian Weekly, and even in the fusty London Times Literary Supplement. Among the concerns of these reviews were the Third's appropriateness for British readers, comparisons with the Oxford English Dictionary (which being a dictionary of historical principles is necessarily descriptive), its store of new words, its changes in format, and its price and bulk.

As interesting comparisons with the hostile reviews in the Journal of the American Bar Association and in Science, there appeared reviews in the British counterpart publications, the Law Times and Nature. The Law Times, like the ABA Journal, notes that words are the tools of a lawyer's trade and that he therefore needs a first class dictionary.

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The Law Times, unlike the ABA Journal, thinks that Webster's Third is a first class dictionary: "It would be difficult to praise too highly the erudition, skill, and industry which have gone to the production of this outstanding volume . . . ."[169] It does not mention the prescriptive intention. Nor does Nature, which simply says that Webster's Third is a very good dictionary for any citizen, including biological scientists.

One of the most careful British reviews was delivered by John Levitt in John O'London's. In it Webster's Third is given, "An enthusiastic welcome . . . on the whole, but with some reservations." Levitt comes by this judgment by considering the requirements of a dictionary and measuring Webster's Third against these. Webster's Third comes out well in meeting the requirements for comprehensiveness and for accurateness and adequateness of definition. Levitt has some reservations about some minor matter of format, about the fact that it is not an historical dictionary (like the OED), and about the "International" quality of it. The point is that he accepts the descriptive principles of Webster's Third without question, for he derived no requirement bearing on this question.

It is clear to see from the British reviews that American reviewers exhibited a special sensitivity to the descriptive principles of the Third International.

An interesting and characteristic spin-off of the Third International controversy, which serves to show the depth of strength of the prescriptive feeling from another angle, involved publishing efforts which developed as a response to Webster's Third.[170]

The most notable of these was an effort of the American Heritage Publishing Company to purchase control of the G. & C. Merriam Company.[171]

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James Parton, the President of American Heritage in the spring of 1962, called the Third International "an affront to scholarship" and announced that Merriam was "badly in need of guidance," and that his company was bidding for sufficient shares of Merriam stock so as to be in control to offer that guidance. The effort of American Heritage to buy into Merriam or to do a dictionary jointly with them had been going on for some years, according to Gordon J. Gallan, Merriam president. Parton said this effort was "speeded up" as a reaction to Webster's Third. He added that if his company got control of Merriam, "We'd take the Third out of print! We'd go back to the Second International and speed ahead on the Fourth. It'd take us two or three years, and the company would lose some sales. But if Merriam keeps on the way it's going, they'll ruin their company."[172]

The effort by American Heritage failed. Later, however, the company negotiated a joint effort with Houghton Mifflin and in 1969 published the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.[173] The introduction to this dictionary contains a rather pointed allusion to the Third when it reads: "To furnish the guidance which we believe to be an essential responsibility of a good dictionary, we have frequently employed usage-context indicators such as 'slang,' or 'regional.'"[174] But the makers of this dictionary went beyond this established prescriptive behavior in asking a panel of:

> . . . 100 outstanding speakers and writers a wide range of questions about how the language is used today, especially with regard to dubious or controversial locutions. After careful tabulation and analysis of their replies, we have prepared several hundred usage notes to guide readers to effectiveness in speech and writing. As a consequence, this Dictionary can claim to be more precisely descriptive, in terms of current usage levels, than any heretofore published--especially in offering the reader the lexical opinions of a large group of highly sophisticated fellow citizens.[175]

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Thus does co-optation proceed in the process of re-establishing the 19th century pattern in 20th century jargon, with deference paid 20th century forces without really submitting to them. As the editor says to a further development of the device, which turns out to be very much what Dwight McDonald called for:

> But the makers of the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language accept usage as the authority for correctness, but they have eschewed the "scientific" delusion that a dictionary should contain no value judgments. Some, to be sure, they [sic] have been merely implicit: the arrant solecisms of the ignoramuses are here often omitted entirely, "irregardless" of how he may feel about this neglect. What is desirable is that when value judgments are explicit, they should be clearly attributed. Thus good usage can usually be distinguished from bad usage, even as good books can be distinguished from bad books. The present editors maintain that those best fitted to make such distinctions are, as Noah Webster said, the enlightened members of the community; not the scholarly theoreticians, not the instinctive verbalizers of the unlettered mass. The best authorities, at least for cultivated usage, are those professional speakers and writers who have demonstrated their sensitiveness to the language and their power to wield it effectively and beautifully.[176]

In taking Richard Grant White's criterion of "best writers and speakers" as his basis for his description as a replacement for the "scientific" notion, Morris confounds the meaning of "usage" and "description" to fit his traditional notions of correctness, while appearing to subsume into his editorial practice major concessions to modern linguistic and lexographic practices. As with some dictionaries, so with much of the linguistic thought of the 20th century: the more things change the more they stay the same.

But as things turned out, the AHD was hoisted by its own petard. For the panel could agree almost not at all. They were in total agreement on only one item--the proscription of "simultaneous" as an adverb ("the election was conducted simultaneous with the referendum"), and in substantial agreement on only fourteen more.[177] The significant

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thing is that they disagreed more than they agreed. The panel was made up of 100 novelists, essayists, poets, journalists, writers on science and sports, public officials, editors, and professors. The list reads like the roll of a neo-genteel apparatus. Ten names chosen at random: Theodore Bernstein (Assistant Managing Editor, The New York Times), Erwin D. Canahn (Editor-in-Chief, The Christian Science Monitor; Past President, American Society of Newspaper Editors; Past Chairman of the Board, United States Chamber of Commerce), Luther Evans (formerly Librarian of Congress), John Fischer (formerly Editor-in-Chief, Harper's Magazine), Lewis Webster Jones (formerly President of Rutgers University, the University of Arkansas, and Bennington College; Past Chairman, Board of Trustees, Educational Testing Service), David McCord (Poet; essayist; Honorary Curator of the Poetry and Farnsworth Room, Harvard College Library), David Ogilvy (Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Ogilvy & Mather International, Inc.), Harlow Shapley (Past President, American Academy of Arts and Sciences and American Association for the Advancement of Science).

The behavior of the panel as regards the usage questions was also non-genteel.

> . . . many of them revealed, on particular questions, an attitude more reminiscent of Dr. Jonson than of the modern linguistic view: they tend to feel that the English language is going to hell if "we" don't do something to stop it, and they tend to feel that their own usage preferences are clearly right.[178]

The panel included also several critics of the Third: Jacques Barzun, Sydney J. Harris, Dwight McDonald, and Mario Pei. The only defender was Roy Copperud, and he had been a reluctant defender.

The editors of the dictionary, because of the panel's great disagreement, are forced to admit

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> . . . a fact that is often conveniently ignored--that among the best qualified to know, there is a very considerable diversity of usage. Anyone surveying the panelists' various opinions is likely to conclude that good usage is indeed an elusive nymph, well worth pursuing but inconsistent in shape and dress, and rather hard to back into a corner.[179]

There is no discussion in the dictionary of a descriptionist's[180] point that such differences are common alternatives, that they make no difference in the sense of the discourse, and are not worth debating about--especially since such debate creates in people needless linguistic neurosis. Instead, the AHD claims that:

> Where this dictionary differs notably from those that have preceded it, with regard to usage, is in exposing the lexical opinions of a larger group of recognized leaders than has heretofore been consulted, so that the ordinary user, looking up an expression whose social status is uncertain, can discover just how and to what extent his presumed betters agree on what he ought to say or write. Thus, he is not turned away uncounseled and uncomforted: he has before him an authoritative statement on a disputed issue; yet, he is left one of the most valuable of human freedoms, the freedom to say what he pleases.[181]

One wonders what comfort a believer in correctness can take in the dogmatic differences expressed by the panel, what counsel? Should one follow the urging of John Kieran or of Walter Kerr? Which is the "authoritative statement?" Lewis Mumford's or Marianne Moore's? And if the freedom to say what one pleases is so valuable, why all the rhetoric about correct usage? Why the apparatus of a usage panel at all? Co-optation appears sometimes to result in awkward postures.

The logical awkwardness aside, the AHD is an interesting consequence of the Third International not only as a further indication of the typical device by which the prescriptive continuity retains its force in the face of the crucial and contrary forces of the 20th century.

A dictionary is a major and important intellectual tool in our kind of culture. An effort by an important publishing effort such as the AHD, especially in the wake of the Third International controversy,

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to promulgate a correctness oriented dictionary is evidence not merely of a cultural vestige of prescriptivism, but of its continuing vitality. The conservative, doctrinaire behavior of the usage panel is further evidence still.

The fact and makeup of the panel suggests an echo of the genteel apparatus. The rhetoric of linguistic uplift of Morris' piece supports this thought. The truth of the notion is made clearer still by observing the device of co-optation and the blunting of conflict that the AHD attempts. In the 19th century the original genteel apparatus attempted to reconcile the conflict between rising Darwinistic science and traditional views, by co-opting emerging ideas and dealing with them idealistically in order to soften the new forces. Science is still the enemy of the neo-genteel apparatus as manifested by the usage panel. In 1969 it co-opts the idea of "description," idealizes the term to include only a supposed linguistic elite, and thus blunts the force of this modern linguistic device by making it re-enforce prescriptive notions.

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CHAPTER FIVE

BLACK ENGLISH AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

My motto as I live and learn,
is dig and be dug in return.

Langston Hughes

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The 1960's and early 70's in America have seen one of the largest and most significant attempts at social engineering ever undertaken in this culture. It is seldom recognized as such because it usually goes by the name of something like "Teaching English as a Second Language (or Dialect)." The project seems, then, merely a technical linguistic or pedagogical problem. But it is, in addition, an issue that goes to the core of American values and aggravates the most basic of American tensions. Moreover, the issue is directly related to and grows out of the configuration that has been developed in this study; it is at base another conflict between the prescriptive notion and the descriptive notion.

The task on the part of schools has been to compel minority groups, notably urban ghetto blacks, to acquire so-called standard English as a replacement or alternative for their native nonstandard dialect in order that these people might experience more success in school and in the job market, as it is assumed that their clear failure as a group in these areas is directly related to the negative reaction to their speech or to the inadequacy of their speech.

To most educators in the 1960's black English and standard English were hard and clear realities. To most linguists—with a few notable exceptions in the case of black English—they were fictions, sometimes useful fictions but fictions nonetheless. Most educators assumed the existence of standard without bothering to define it, but occasionally there appeared an attempt at definition. One textbook from the late 60's says:

> standard English is that language system that is acceptable and understood by the vast majority of the people in our society, even those who may speak a nonstandard variety of English. It is the "universal dialect" of our society. It is the English spoken

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> by most government officials, TV announcers, and educated people. More importantly, it is the language of the classroom.[182]

This definition is based upon Charles Fries' formulation, but Fries pointed out what this quoted definition does not, that the speech "used to carry on the important affairs of our country" differs from region to region.[183] As the recognized leader of American dialectologists says in generalizing about the American English dialect situation:

> . . . we conclude . . . that the two important characteristics of American English, from the point of view of the linguistic geographer, are its relative unity and homogeneity, and the persistence of variety at the standard level.[184]

Perhaps American educators have confused the relative homogeneity of American speech (vis-a-vis other cultures similar to our own such as Britain, France, or Germany) for the existence of a standard. More likely, however, the strength and persistence of the prescriptive linguistic doctrine has structured the perception of the American educator. The result is that in the 1960's one finds educators defining standard dialect as would be appropriate for Britain with its received standard British English, the cultivated dialect of the southeast of England. On the other hand, one finds linguists claiming something quite different: "In the United States . . . no one dialect of American English seems the recognized national standard."[185]

The objective reality of Negro nonstandard is debatable, still a research question. The same textbook from which the definition of standard just given was taken also opts for the existence of Negro dialect and defines it.[186] The definition there is based upon research done at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D. C. by William Stewart and on research done by William Labov in Harlem.[187] This research showed, as interpreted by the textbook writer, that there is a Negro variety of English which differs not only from standard English but from

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other nonstandard varieties as well. Further, this variety is found to be "relatively uniform" among "culturally disadvantaged" Negroes throughout the United States. The definition then ends with a rather weak statement so far as the ethos of the argument is concerned: "Even if there is not a variety of English spoken exclusively by Negroes, the fact is the great majority of culturally disadvantaged Negro pupils speak a nonstandard variety of English." This last suggests that the argument is interesting but not important. Probably it is not important so far as the schools' straightforward task of engineering out nonstandard and engineering in the mythical standard is concerned. But the question of a genuine ghetto nonstandard is important in an issue this study will raise later on, the issue of sociological and psychological consequences of the school system's linguistic engineering.

Most linguistic geographers see Negro nonstandard as migratory southern speech. Even a sociolinguist like Stewart, who in some of his work posits some unique features of Negro nonstandard, asserts that:

> Most varieties of nonstandard, urban Negro speech would seem to derive from rural southern dialects which, because of migration patterns within the nation, have been brought into many metropolitan areas of the North and the West Coast.[188]

Dwight Bolinger has shown how this migration has resulted in "a grave social problem"[189] by a process that he labels "the horizontal imposed on the vertical."[190] The geographical migration of poor southern workers to the urban North, especially in the case of poor blacks, brings two divergent regional dialects into contrast. At the same time the social dialect of the migrants is characteristically that termed uneducated, (linguists generally agree that across the country there are three main social dialects: uneducated, common, and cultivated, principally indexed by education). The migrants dialect is regarded as non-

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standard even in the home southern region. Therefore, in the urban North the speech of blacks and poor migrant whites is twice alien, once socially and once regionally. This established as great a linguistic contrast as can be created in the relatively homogeneous American English speech community.

The practices of racial segregation and discrimination help explain the persistence of Negro nonstandard even into the third and fourth generations. Because migrant blacks were forced into ghettos and denied jobs and education which should lead out of the ghetto, the southern, uneducated speech communities remain intact. As the same people habitually talked to each other year after year, generation after generation, the community speech habits of pronunciation, morphology, syntax and vocabulary were enforced and maintained.

The fact that the ghetto speech of Harlem, Watts, or Detroit seems to differ very little is not surprising if one notes that the black migrants have been by and large from the same southern dialect area historically--from the "Black Belt" southern plantation region.

Research in the 1960's produced a body of evidence large enough to at least suggest the possibility that Negro nonstandard is a different system than other uneducated nonstandard speech.[191] As has been mentioned, this makes little difference pedagogically, since Negro nonstandard is at any rate clearly intelligible to other American English speakers. This research does make a difference in terms of possible attitudes resulting from this notion and in terms of possible signaling of a different cognitive system.

Many examples of difference can be found in the literature. For instance, here is a set of sentences showing one kind of contrast:

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STANDARD ENGLISH--We were eating--and drinking too.
WHITE NONSTANDARD--We was eatin'--an' drinkin' too.
BLACK NONSTANDARD--We was eatin'--an' we drinkin' too.[192]

Some linguists believe that Negro nonstandard is a relexification of some Proto-creole grammatical structure. This notion postulates a deep structure different from other dialects of American English and would explain satisfactorily certain differences between black speech and other southern dialects.[193]

Other linguists continue to insist that most features of black nonstandard, with the exception of some few vocabulary items, as well as other nonstandard speech, have their origins in the folk speech of England,[194] that differences between black and other nonstandard forms can be accounted for by normal linguistic changes that have occurred in the ghettos, that blacks learned to speak English from poor southern whites and to this day share the same deep structure with other English speakers. Put this notion beside the statement that " . . . investigators are just beginning to recognize that Negro speech is a language system unto itself which differs from 'standard' English in everything but vocabulary," and one has at the sort of technical dilemma that can and in this instance does lead to high feeling, because it is connected with such an explosive issue for Americans.

It seems clear from the evidence that, whatever their origin, there are features of black English that are unique. For example, in Negro nonstandard he working means he is working right now; but he be working means he is working all the time. In standard English he is working does the job of both of these nonstandard forms, showing both duration and immediacy; or to put it another way, one cannot indicate the distinctions in standard using this syntactical frame that can be expressed in the black English.

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Another case is the way, in a certain instance, black English can express uncertainty by a structural shift where standard English uses a vocabulary term:

> STANDARD--I don't know <u>if</u> Robert can come over tonight.
> BLACK NONSTANDARD--I don't know can Robert come over tonight.[195]

Also, black English in some cases is less redundant structurally: "two boy workin'" instead of the standard "two boys working," since the noun is already marked as plural by the "two."[196] Some forms become even more alien, such as the verb forms of a common black English sentence: "I been see(n) it yesterday,"[197] which jars white ears a great deal more than the common Zero Copula--"he good;" "they over there."

It is clear that these forms exist systematically in black speech and that these and other forms are social markers.

The Detroit Dialect Study (DDS) found that a number of phonological, morphological, syntactical, and vocabulary items--for example, multiple negation (He don't want none) and pronominal apposition (My brother he told me) showed definite correlation with variables of social status, age, sex, and race.[198] Raven MacDavid studied American speech to construct a checklist to find socially diagnostic features and came up with 26 which lend themselves to systematic drill. (His study was motivated by linguistic engineering motives; therefore, he ignored the features that could not be turned into schoolroom drill.)

But having said this, it is also necessary to note that MacDavid found that none of the features on his list could be identified exclusively with any racial group, though in any one community some may be relatively more frequent among whites or blacks.[199] The Detroit Dialect Study makes the point that:

> Current research in Detroit . . . shows striking overlapping between the speech of supposedly divergent social, racial, age,

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> and ethnic groups. We are coming to realize that the really significant social markers of language aren't so much a matter of total usage by one group and total avoidance by the other. Instead we find that a large number of features of social stratification are used to varying degrees by all groups. The difference, then, is quantitative, not qualitative. On the surface this would seem to make the problem simpler. But the fact that the contrast between social dialects is frequently not quantitatively great may only dull our sensitivities to the social significance of this quantitatively minor contrast. That is, though differences may be small, attitudes toward these minute differences are great and we should guard against being lulled into thinking otherwise.[200]

The Detroit Dialect Study also emphasizes the point that the labels "Negro speech" and "lower class speech" are capricious, because to do so is to assume that they exist before they have been identified by investigation and research.[201]

As regards standard English, the evidence seems clear on the point that the concept "standard English" in America is an objective fiction. As a practical matter "standard" becomes the cultivated social dialect of the particular region where it is applied, or an abstract ideal--"schoolmarm English"--in the case of many schoolrooms. The objective reality of Negro nonstandard is debatable, still a research question; but as a practical matter, whatever differences do exist between standard and Negro nonstandard are quantitatively few, exist in deep structure with relatively little reflection on the performance of the speech. Consequently, the speech of lower class black ghetto dwellers is mutually intelligible with any other American English dialect, social, regional, or occupational. The evidence is clear on this point.

But the linguistic reality is not nearly as important as what Americans believe and their attitudes toward that belief.

One of the most important attitudes of Americans about black speech has been the deficit theory.

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The Detroit Dialect Study attempted to get at the assumptions and attitudes toward black Detroit speech on the part of teachers by asking 700 teachers the following two questions:

> 1) What do you think are the major problems your children have with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation?
>
> 2) In what way does the language of the parents influence children in your class? What problems with vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in the language of the parents are reflected in the problems of the child?[202]

The results of this questioning revealed very clearly that Detroit teachers held black speech to be essentially a deprived form of English. For example, 80% of the teachers observed that their students had a "limited vocabulary."[203] A characteristic reason offered for this, in the words of one teacher: "I think it's because of the background of the home and the lack of books at home, the lack of communication with the family."[204] Another teacher said that, "In the inner-city, the child's vocabulary is very limited. His experiences are very limited."[205] There was no indication by the teachers that the home might provide a different kind of vocabulary. The study notes the teachers equated the lack of school vocabulary with the lack of any vocabulary.[206] Many teachers even assumed that black children had " . . . a vocabulary of about a hundred and some words, I'd say no more than that."[207] This view was so frequent in the study as to become a stereotype of the teaching profession, in the opinion of the workers in the Detroit Dialect Study.[208]

Another common generalization of the Detroit teachers was that black children use monosyllables and fail to "speak in sentences."[209] One third of the teachers characterized the children's greatest problem as the failure to speak in sentences and/or complete thoughts.[210] But the teachers had the most to say about pronunciation: as many as 13%

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of them believed that some of the students did not talk at all when they first came to school. An equal ratio believed that some children did not know or hear the sounds of the language.[211] The teachers had similar deficit notions about grammar and other aspects of language, but their attitude as a whole is best summed up by the words of one: " . . . the children are simply language starved."[212]

These attitudes, of course, are by no means restricted to teachers of English in Detroit. They manifest themselves commonly as assumptions in the literature about teaching English in the 1960's. Here is F. Elizabeth Metz who is Head Speech and Hearing Clinician with the Phoenix, Arizona, Public Elementary School District writing in Elementary English.[213] For one thing, she points out that Negro children lack the ability for abstraction and symbolization in language. Her example (one would hope not her evidence) of this is the labeling of a ladder a "get up" on the part of a Negro child.[214] She says that from a study she made of the written language of ten year olds, she confirmed the notion that Negro children lack the ability to use progressive verb forms. When shown action pictures and asked, "What is he doing?" the Negro child would usually respond, "He skating," rather than, "He is skating," omitting the auxiliary.[215] This is clearly a characteristic, systematic, and consistent form within the Negro nonstandard dialect, which suggests that Metz knows little about Negro speech and is simply reasoning from her prescriptive notion that the white middle class "standard" way is the only way. Metz assures teachers that "language deprived" children will need constant and special attention, and "Even then, the children may not have in their own mental warehouses the vocabulary needed to express their ideas."[216]

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During the closing days of the 89th Congress one of the pieces of legislation spawned by the black English issue was enacted in the form of a bill authorizing the Department of Labor to refer persons for instruction in "communications skills." This was an effort to improve the job suitability of black people by teaching them "standard English." The chief witness at the hearings which preceded the legislation was Charles J. Hurst, Jr., head of Howard University's speech department. Dr. Hurst's testimony revealed the language deprivation theory clearly: "In a middle-class family, there is a certain amount of verbal play, puns, and so forth going on. What this [black] youngster needs is the interaction to stimulate him."[217] To achieve this, Professor Hurst in his own program fitted voice-activated miniature tape recorders inside teddy bears, so that the child when playing with the bears would discover that if he talked to the bear, it would respond, and in standard English, of course—thus the child could have hours of "conversation" in standard English.[218]

At the 55th Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, Dr. Muriel Crosby, the Assistant Superintendent of the Wilmington, Delaware, Public Schools, who was to be president of NCTE during 1966, delivered a speech to the convention in which she raised the black English issue and the issue of the school as social agent, and in which she clearly proclaims the deficit theory: "Notable among the inadequacies of the disadvantaged is the ability to generalize, to see cause and effect relationships."[219] Crosby also claimed that based upon her own observation of black children in Wilmington and upon the testimony of social workers it was clear to her that welfare mothers reveal " . . . inability to postpone immediate satisfactions, to look ahead." Crosby attributes these inadequacies to failings of logic; she does not

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mention the possibility of other causes. The failings for her are somehow related to the blacks' dialect--the ultimate villain to people of Crosby's perception.

The Head Start Program is a case of an entire schooling program resting squarely on the linguistic deficit assumption. In the words of President Johnson, one of the major goals of Head Start was "to increase verbal and conceptual skills,"[220] which it was felt were lacking because of the ghetto environment.

William Labov has summed up the popular deficit theory in these terms:

> Negro children from the ghetto . . . receive little verbal stimulation, are said to hear very few well-formed sentences, do not know the names of common subjects, cannot form concepts or convey logical thoughts.[221]

Most socio-linguists attribute the deficit theory to the work of a few educational psychologists, but the notion is too widespread and firmly fixed to be merely the result of research that most teachers never read or talked about. It seems more likely that the deficit theory is a natural child of the prescriptive notion. In the 1960's teachers because of the concern about, if not the practice of, racial integration became aware of a great body of speech which is clearly not "standard"; read "correct" in 19th century jargon. Since it is not in the nature of the prescriptive attitude to recognize diversity--difference--the difference was perceived as deficit. Indeed, there is in the 1960's a great deal of work among educational psychologists in ghetto culture, but given the prescriptive linguistic attitudes it is certainly not surprising that the work should contain this bias.

Chief among the academic gurus of the verbal deprivation theory in the 1960's were Basil Bernstein, a British sociologist, Martin Deutsch,

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and Arthur Jensen, among others.[222] The notion of verbal deprivation developed by these researchers has been vigorously attacked and debunked as a "modern mythology of educational psychology" by a number of sociolinguists and others who work with black children in the ghetto communities. The most impressive of these attacks on the deficit theory has been William Labov's "The Logic of Non-standard English."[223]

Labov in a very long and detailed article argues that:

> . . . these [deficit] notions are based upon the work of educational psychologists who know very little about language and even less about Negro children. The concept of verbal deprivation has no basis in social reality: in fact, Negro children in the urban ghettos receive a great deal of verbal stimulation, hear more well-formed sentences than middle-class children, and participate fully in a highly verbal culture; they have the same basic vocabulary, possess the same capacity for conceptual learning, and use the same logic as any one else who learns to speak and understand English.[224]

The task that Labov sees for the linguist in the issue is one which translates very readily into the descriptive linguistic orientation:

> The most useful service which linguists can perform today is to clear away the illusion of "verbal deprivation" and provide a more adequate notion of the relations between standard and nonstandard dialects.[225]

Here is the appreciation of diversity, the acceptance of usage doctrine, the toleration of language as it functions normally in the community. Inasmuch as the verbal deprivation theory fits easily into the prescriptive notion, especially in terms of its notion of the logical superiority of standard and the implicit support of the authority of school and book, once again the continuous confrontation between the two linguistic notions arises in the language and style of the 1960's.

It seems worthwhile to examine Labov's debunking of the deficit theory because it points up some of the details of the 1960's confrontation between the descriptive-prescriptive notions, and because it

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shows some of the crucial social roles of these attitudes. Moreover, it is a central document in the entire issue of black English in the 1960's.

Labov devotes much of his article to presenting evidence for the verbality of ghetto culture. His conclusion:

> The view of the Negro speech community which we obtain from our work in the ghetto areas is precisely the opposite from that reported by Deutsch, Englemann and Bereiter [the reference is to three prominent proponents of the deficit theory].
>
> We see a child bathed in verbal stimulation from morning to night. We see many speech events which depend upon the competitive exhibition of verbal skills: singing, sounding, toasts, rifting, lowding--a whole range of activities in which the individual gains status through his use of language.[226]

Labov criticizes the deficit theorists' interview and testing procedures and points to these as producing the evidence to support the notion of deficit which originated initially because of the failure of ghetto blacks in the schools. The Detroit Dialect Study agreed, saying that:

> The notion that children in disadvantaged homes are the products of language deprivation seems to mean only that the investigators proved to be such a cultural barrier to the interviewee that the informants were too frightened and awed to talk freely or that the investigators simply asked the wrong questions.[227]

Labov goes so far as to contrast ghetto verbality with what he labels middle class verbosity.

> . . . in many ways working-class speakers are more effective narrators, reasoners and debaters than many middle class speakers who temporize, qualify, and lose their argument in a mass of irrelevant detail. Many academic writers try to rid themselves of that part of middle-class style that is empty pretension, and keep that part that is needed for precision. But the average middle-class speaker that we encounter makes no such effort; he is enmeshed in verbiage, the victim of sociolinguistic factors beyond his control.[228]

With this Labov is turning the argument back against the deficit theorists. Labov insists that their long conditioned reaction to

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middle class verbosity leads Americans to believe that because they recognize that the dialect is one of an educated person the person is therefore saying something intelligent, an obverse reaction to the one that most middle class people have toward the social dialect of ghetto blacks.[229]

Labov takes pains through copious examples to establish the point that black speech is not only capable of logic, but is often much more effective logically because it tends to be more free of the middle class stylistic features which grow out of the felt need to qualify, temporize, and hedge until the point and the logic of the discourse is lost in a tangle of trivia and circumlocution.

The upshot is that Labov believes that if there is a failure of logic involved in this issue it is with the deprivation theorists. He isolated six distinct steps in the reasoning which led to the verbal deficit theory: first of all, that the lower-class child's verbal responses to a formal situation which he perceived as threatening were used to demonstrate the depraved nature of his speech; second, educational psychologists saw the verbal deficit as the major cause of the blacks' poor performance in school; third, because middle class children did better in school, middle class speech was seen as the reason for the success; fourth, the differences in black speech, such as were demonstrated earlier in this chapter were seen as evidence of logical difficulties; fifth, therefore teaching the ghetto child standard English was equated with teaching him logic. Finally, it was assumed that as a result of this training in standard English the child's logic would improve, with a concommitant improvement in overall school performance.[230]

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Labov and others of his persuasion saw the essential fallacy of the deprivation theory as linking of the educational failure of the child to his personal deficiencies.[231] As Stephen Baratz of the National Institute of Mental Health and his collaborator, Joan Baratz, put it," . . . Negro children do not need as their first priority smaller classes, intensive social programs [such as Operation Head Start, a deficit theory program], etc. What they need most is an educational system that first recognizes their abilities and their culture, that draws upon these strengths, and that incorporates them into the teaching process."[232]

Thus the process of following the thread of continuity of the prescriptive-descriptive tension in American linguistic attitudes has led a long way beyond the simple quarrels about usage in the 19th century and the bitter conflict about what a dictionary should reflect in the early 1960's and into fundamental questions about how whole groups of people will relate to American institutions. For this is the next consideration: no matter if one opts for the deficit theory or the difference theory the question remains of how to deal with the black child in the school and, more to the point of this study, what attitudes will form the actions in the schools and the other institutions within the culture.

While the deficit theory existed unchallenged, it motivated much remedial type activity, such as Operation Head Start, in the nation; and in the school it was responsible for the eradication movement. That is, teachers sought simply to eradicate the native dialect of minority people and replace it with standard English.

Perhaps the clearest expression of this position by a professional educator was made publically in 1966 by the then California Superinten-

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dent of Public Instruction, Max Rafferty:

> English operates under set rules which have little or nothing to do with social stratification or whether Johnny lives on Park Avenue or under a bridge somewhere. In the semantic battle between 'Enry 'Iggins and Eliza Doolittle, Professor Higgins was right. Obviously.
>
> So spare me the anguished protests that Johnny needs to learn more important things, that English grammar is really Latinized syntax and that it doesn't matter just so long as Johnny can make himself understood.
>
> It matters a lot. Correct English just has to be taught to the next generation unless we want a replay of the Tower of Babel bit around 1984.[233]

The use of Rafferty testimony, because of his well advertized "extremism," might be considered shooting fish in an historical rain-barrel, despite the fact that his popularity as measured by his political success indicates that he was representing something more than the attitudes of a lunatic fringe. If Rafferty is considered too extreme, then consider the work of Ruth I. Golden[234] in Detroit, one of the first to use second language learning methods for instilling standard English. Golden's book and her efforts were widely and favorably received throughout the nation and created for her a very solid reputation among school people.

Often, the iron fist of eradication was swathed in a velvet glove of seeming toleration and appreciation of difference. For example, Elizabeth Metz wrote:

> The goal for speech sound articulation should not be absolute uniformity. Regional expressions and dialect often enrich our total language. Change should be a goal, however, when differences lessen intelligibility of speech or when they are commonly identified as nonstandard English.[235]

Eradication was the goal at all levels where non-standard speakers were encountered. For example, a letter to this writer from a teacher in Yale's Transitional Year Program to prepare "disadvantaged" students

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for the rigors of Yale indicates this:

> Last year I was a graduate student and T. A. at San Diego State and was on the committee which asked you to speak to the T. A.'s on the problem of dialects and substandard English and on how the teacher shall deal with the problem. It was a very enlightening discussion that you led and all of us who heard you came away with a much easier feeling about teaching students with different language habits from what we call "standard" usage.
>
> Now in a different institution, I am again faced with teaching disadvantaged college freshmen and I anticipate that the problem of dealing with dialects will again arise. (In fact, it already has, in discussions, and the prevailing attitude seems to be that we must concentrate on demanding standard usage.)[236]

In conjunction with this, it might be added that there is much evidence that it is just on this point such programs as Yale's Transitional Year and the Economic Opportunity Programs in California colleges and universities have had their most substantive difficulties--how to deal with the student's nonstandard dialect in the face of the rigid demands of not only the standard but the literary standard dialect of our more fastidious campuses.

Sophisticated observers of the period characterize it as being marked by the " . . . unrelenting pressure to abolish differences."[237] Roger Shuy has labeled eradication the "Bonnie and Clyde syndrome."[238]

> The great American assumption . . . [was] to rid oneself of the stigma of those [nonstandard] features by simply eradicating the features, a time honored tradition in the English departments of our country.[239]

Thus the prescriptive tradition flourishes.

The short life of the eradication movement among the leaders and theorists of the English teaching fraternity is probably a tribute to the growing influence on the teaching of English on the part of linguistic science. Linguists and fellow travelers had been seeking to exert this influence for generations, but it is not until the sixth decade of the 20th century that it is manifested. The significant

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feature of this manifestation is that it is marked by true genteel restraint. That is to say, that the implementation of the linguistic-descriptive notion is compromised not only by the normal and expected lag in the rank and file of English teachers (as, for example, illustrated by the naive responses on the part of Detroit teachers cited in DDS). It is conceivable that many, perhaps most, English teachers believe in eradication, either implicitly or explicitly, in the early 70's. But the thrust is clearly away from eradication and toward "enlightened bidialectalism." But this normal lag is not of great significance in blunting the influence of the linguistic-descriptive notion on the issue of black English. What is significant must be explained by first examining the attitude known by the label "enlightened bidialectalism."[240]

In the label "enlightened bidialectalism," the enlightened refers to what teachers have learned from listening finally to linguists. Linguists maintain that all dialects, including the dialects spoken by many black ghetto dwellers, are fully developed, sophisticated, complex language systems. The studies of black English mentioned earlier established this solidly. The dialect of the lower class black serves him well in the ghetto and if the school eradicates it and replaces it with so-called standard, which might serve him well in school, he would be in trouble at home for abandoning the dialect of his family and peers.

Wrote J. L. Dillard:

> . . . the teacher might as well accept the preachings of a generation of linguistic reformers and give up talk of localisms and social dialect forms as "errors."
>
> But this surely does not mean that the teacher should give up teaching anything else. With a great deal of [standard English

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> as a second dialect] . . . methodology available as an alternative to puristic condemnation, the teacher need be impaled on neither horn of the dilemma--condemn or teach localisms.[241]

For teachers claim they know very well that if blacks are to become socially mobile and if they are to find success in the school, they must acquire "standard English." "Students should be taught the biloquial principle--that home speech and social upward mobility speech, for example, might be inappropriate in each other's contexts."[242] Thus bidialectalism has become the meeting ground between linguists and enlightened teachers. The solution has been to make the student proficient in the standard that he would need to get plugged into the American Dream and at the same time allow him to use his "home" dialect in the appropriate places.

This effort in the school during the 60's and early 70's has been enormous, often aided by Federal legislation and private foundation grants. The energy of bidialectalism seems to have signaled something greater than mere pedagogy at work.

A careful investigation of the phenomenon reveals two sets of related motives. First of all, the movement is a manifestation of an old tension in the educational institution and in the general culture that this study has followed from 1820: the prescriptive-descriptive tension. Second, these motives are entwined with certain social goals which are referred to when the term "American Dream" is trotted out--which is often.

Now first regarding the prescriptive basis for bidialectalism: the basis is easily seen in the argument for bidialectalism, for a basic inconsistency appears--such inconsistency is characteristically a signal of a covert motive lurking beneath the rational discourse. In the argument for bidialectalism we have the proposition derived

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from linguistic evidence that all dialects are able to perform the communication function.[243] The teacher grants this, yet assigns the use of standard to all socially important roles, telling the students in effect: "Your native dialect is fine for home use and for activities in the ghetto, but when you try to achieve anything in school or in the larger culture use the standard I'm trying to teach you." This "separate but equal" doctrine is a familiar one to blacks, and we may be sure that many read the covert message it bears.

Sociolinguists were fond of writing articles in the 1960's exposing the contrasting motives of eradicationists and bidialectalists. "The former lean heavily on time honored notions of rightness, giving little concern to cultural relativism or social pluralism."[244] The advocates of bidialectalism, " . . . feel it is their duty as educators to provide the learner with the alternatives to make his life what he wants it to be."[245] Yet, the alternatives are nearly always presented so that there is not genuine choice--every effort was made in the 60's to push the student toward the standard. For example, in the article just quoted, the author Roger Shuy, notes that most current materials deal with pronunciation differences between standard and nonstandard, although linguists know that grammatical differences count more heavily toward social judgments than phonological or lexical differences. "If grammatical matters count more heavily in social judgments, it seems reasonable to assume that grammatical matters should receive high priority in materials development."[246] This is a characteristic example of how the linguist has been co-opted by the school to serve its prescriptive goal. Shuy, one of the most able sociolinguists, begins this particular article with an appreciation of nonstandard, then moves to an attack on eradication. "The

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reason," he says, "for the low esteem in which nonstandard English is held derives from mankind's lowest points. Snobbery, hatred, inequality, racism and jealousy are still likely candidates."[247] Yet he ends his article by telling teachers how they can best use linguistic materials to engineer out the nonstandard from their students and engineer in the lingua franca of the classroom.

In other places this relationship between the linguistic scientist and the bidialectalism effort is more explicit. The Detroit Dialect Study described one of its objectives this way:

> To describe the specialized linguistic features of the various English speaking sub-cultures of Detroit . . . linguistic sociologists and educators [agree] that a sound procedure for any kind of English language engineering must begin with the actual speech of the various classes, age, groups, races, occupation groups, and immigrants. Once the phonology, grammar, and lexicon have been adequately described, pedagogical applications can be made with efficiency and accuracy.[248]

Linguists know better than anybody else that "making children who talk wrong get right with the world has traditionally been the work of English teachers," and they must know that their materials will be used for this prescriptive purpose. They know--but the social motives for this task seem too formidable and important to ignore.

J. L. Dillard, a linguist and Director of the Urban Language Study for the Center for Applied Linguistics, said in 1966 that:

> It seems fortunate that [a study of Negro nonstandard urban language] was conceived, on partly independent grounds, at about the time that the educational and social problems of these Negroes began to assume importance to the nation as a whole.[249]

It seems strange that a professional of J. L. Dillard's demonstrated ability and acuteness should have been naive enough to believe that these two things should be even partly independent. The press in the 1960's, for example, would have told him of the relationship in a

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report on legislation enacted by the 89th Congress setting up a program for teaching "standard English" to urban Negroes to make them more suitable for the job market.[250] If one recalls that at this time the smoke from Watts and Detroit was still acrid in the nostrils of the white establishment Dillard's ingenuousness becomes more clear. Indeed, Dillard must have read his own colleagues and learned that, "By far the most commonly stated reason for teaching children to be biloquial is to enable them to ascend the social ladder."[251]

The point is that some linguists and most enlightened teachers see themselves as "social realists." No matter what the viability of black English as a speech system:

> It seems clear . . . that it is necessary to teach standard English to Non-standard speakers. They must know the language of the country if they are to become a part of the mainstream of that society. . . . since standard English is the language of the mainstream it seems clear that knowledge of the mainstream system increases the likelihood of success in the mainstream culture.[252]

The Detroit Dialect Study pointed out in 1967 that:

> It is the conviction of an increasing number of linguists that the speech of Americans is one of the most important clues to upward social mobility. Sociologists, psychologists, educators and others have pointed to a large number of indices of social stratification based on behavior, attitudes and abilities. But, to the linguist none of these indices seems as significant as language itself, for not only does it underly the very structure of communication, but it is also frequently beneath the surface of consciousness.[253]

It is this conviction, apparently, that has led so many linguists to work so hard to develop materials to help the schools in their linguistic engineering.

Said the Detroit Dialect Study elsewhere:

> . . . the long cherished notion of the mutually exclusive tasks of linguist and educator is in serious question. Linguists cannot divorce themselves from matters of educational sequencing for their work yields very clear implications for the classroom.

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> . . . [The linguist's] clear responsibility is to identify the indices of social stratification . . . and to determine the best sequencing of instruction through the discovery of the speaker's conscious control of these features.[254]

Thus do the linguist and the teacher place themselves in support of the corporate state. And thus it becomes clearer that bidialectalism is a political instrument. It is, as Robert Kaplan has noted, an attempt on the part of the power structure " . . . to expedite assimilation and thereby to prevent the use of force and the disruption of the status quo."[255]

All of this may seem on the surface perfectly straight-forward and, indeed, the best means of dealing with a serious social problem. Certainly it seems so to most of the public and to many intelligent, well intentioned teachers and linguists. Some few observers, among them some linguists, are beginning to have doubts.

Bidialectalism is a creature of the melting pot theory of American culture, an attempt to help implement the American dream of social mobility for all. How, then, could anyone sensitive to the plight of black Americans be skeptical of the effort? The skepticism can be sorted out under three rubrics: 1. technical linguistic objections; 2. social-psychological objections; 3. moral objections.

The technical objections to bidialectalism reflect very clearly the descriptive side of the tension which is being once again asserted in the black English issue. For the objections to bidialectalism are based on an uncompromising linguistic view of the notion of bidialectalism--a view informed by the strong commitment of 20th century cultural relativism, most disinclined to be co-opted by the school and made to adjust to an essentially prescriptive goal for the sake of "social realism." Linguistic critics of bidialectalism cannot forget that the

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linguistic evidence indicates that differences between so-called Negro nonstandard and so-called standard are not racial in the long view, and that the differences are not a major impediment to communication between the two groups of people.[256] They are aware of the fact that there is not a reliable description of the Negro nonstandard (or even of standard English) on which to base the materials for the linguistic engineering.[257] Some linguists cannot ignore what they know of the nature of linguistic authority: that the paltry bit of formal authority the school exerts cannot have much effect against the enormous influence of the informal authority that the speaker meets elsewhere in the speech community.[258] Some linguists are unimpressed with what they consider negligible results compared to the enormous investment of time and energy on the part of the schools.[259] In short, there is doubt that the project is technically possible. The fact that bidialectalism remains so important in education in the face of so little accomplishment is testimony to its felt social urgency. This sort of perception may have been in the mind of the black student who remarked cynically to Kenneth Goodman: "Ya man, alls I gotta do is walk right and talk right and they gonna make me President of the United States."[260]

It is important to keep the perception of such a student in mind when considering the second argument against forced bidialectalism: social and psychological objections. After all, what the assimilationist accomplishes with standard English as a second dialect at most is the ability on the part of the black to avoid some linguistic forms which are stigmatized because the people who use them are.[261] Kenneth Goodman pointed out that:

> In essence the child who is made to accept another dialect for learning must accept the view that his own language is inferior.

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> In a very real sense, since this is the language of his own parents, his family, his community, he must reject his own culture and himself, as he is, in order to become something else. This is perhaps too much to ask of any child. Even those who succeed may carry permanent scars. The school may force many to make this choice between self respect and school acceptance. And all this must be accomplished on the faith of the learner, that by changing his language he will do himself some good.[262]

Bidialectical programs threaten to demand the destruction of a legitimate culture and of the legitimate identity of blacks as the price of integration.[263] What has given the white middle class community the right to ask the black to pay this price to achieve identity?

In a great measure the middle class community has taken the right from the prescriptive linguistic tradition.

The notion of a pluralistic society is as viable as the melting pot notion, and certainly more obtainable as a social reality. Cultural and linguistic differences are not incompatible with political, social and educational equality. A freely discovered selfhood for blacks seems more desirable than an imposed identity. The tension is between a minority and a majority, both of whom have recognized the importance of language. The difference is that the majority seeks to assimilate the minority through linguistic standardization as a means to other kinds of standardization. The minority may, if given the chance, seek identity from that language.[264] This, of course, is a manifestation of the characteristic tension in American culture that this study has developed--the tension between the puritan-genteel continuity and the romantic thrust. The fact that the puritan drive is institutionalized in the school is no surprise given the fact that the broadening of public education ran historically parallel with the emergence of the genteel tradition, and in many ways concommitant with it. As a result, in the 60's the force of the prescriptive-puritan-genteel tradition in

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the schools amounted to, essentially, an attack on minority culture. This has been unfortunate for many reasons, not the least of which can be seen in evidence which suggests that the verbal environment in the ghetto and in certain other minority subcultures may be better models of verbal achievement than the middle class model that seeks to replace the minority models. Labov's findings in this area have already been mentioned.[265] Thomas Kochman did cross cultural comparisons and concluded that black ghetto culture, for example, rewards and values active, accomplished verbal behavior more than middle class culture. While middle class culture rewards and values writing more highly, it would replace the active verbal ethos of the black with the white passive-receptive-obedient ethos of the middle class school system.[266]

Third, it is not difficult to see how these objections easily drift into the area of moral concern. The evidence that the bidialectal programs are educationally wasteful and socially destructive alone place the programs in the area of moral concern. There are other and related concerns as well. Bidialectalism forces the teacher and the school to make choices which are properly not theirs about the future, values, and identity of the students. An example in higher education was the decision in 1971 of the University of California, Irvine, to consolidate its Economic Opportunity Program (a special academic arrangement for minority students) into the general administration so that minorities could be brought into the "educational mainstream," in the language of the Irvine Vice Chancellor. Richard Buffum writing in the Los Angeles Times reports the view of Tim Knowles, the deposed director of the EOP program at that institution as follows:

> Neither ethnic group [blacks and chicanos] . . . is prepared to lie down docilely and accept the melting pot theory of racial and

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> cultural assimilation--particularly when it is imposed arbitrarily and callously from above by "the man." Minorities, committed to their proud struggle to discover their unique identities, to create their own destinies by making free choices, deeply resent the white knowing what's best for them and then lowering the boom.
>
> White liberals especially, it seems, are obsessed with opening doors for minorities, then emasculating them in the system.[267]

Buffum adds his own accurate inference that, "The struggle for broad human rights is an agonizing conflict between the tyranny of cultural chauvinism and the tyranny of each individual's personal sense of uniqueness and worth."[268] In the black English issue cultural chauvinism at the beginning of the 70's has the decided edge, at least in southern California.

The linguist who has seen this clearly and stated it most forcibly is James Sledd. He has bluntly labeled bidialectalism the "linguistics of White supremacy."

> The immorality of that effort . . . [of] trying to turn black people into uneasy imitiation of the whites . . . is the chief reason why enforced bi-dialectalism should not be tolerated even if it were possible. Predators can and do use dialect differences to exploit and oppress, because ordinary people can be made to doubt their own value and to accept subservience if they can be made to despise the speech of their fathers. Obligatory bi-dialectalism for minorities is only another mode of exploitation, another way of making blacks behave as whites would like them to. It is unnecessary for communication, since the ability to understand other dialects is easily attained, as the black child shows when she translates her teacher's prissy white model "his hat" into "he hat"; its psychological consequences are likely to be nervous affectation, self-distrust, dislike for everyone not equally afflicted with the itch to get ahead, and eventual frustration by the discovery that the reward for so much suffering is intolerably small.[269]

It may be, in addition, that the whole effort is based on a mistaken assumption that blacks have been denied jobs and opportunity chiefly because of their dialect. Sledd and others have charged that northern employers and labor leaders have reacted against black faces and use black English as an excuse. Certainly, one wonders if such

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enormous energy, talent, and money as is invested in the bidialectalism program couldn't in the long run pay off better if invested in the more profound social change that seems needed to finally grant justice and freedom to black people.

For in the final analysis enlightened bidialectalism, like eradication, is nothing more or less than an attempt of the educational institution and society in general to cover up their own failures. Instead of adjusting to the social realities in America in the 60's, the school sought to remedy its failure to meet the needs of black and other minority groups in the school by focusing on supposed personal deficiencies; it sought to engineer the students to fit into the system, instead of changing the system to meet the needs of minority students who, naturally enough, did not respond to the 19th century WASP structure the educational system seeks to impose.

There is some comfort in the thought that bidialectalism was not the worst of options. Arthur Jensen, an educational psychologist, was a leading proponent of the deficit theory. He has recently suggested that scientists ought to test the hypothesis of the genetic inferiority of Negroes. This move of Arthur Jensen from the deficit theory of black speech to the deficit notion of black people may at first seem tangential to the central concern of this study, but it is directly relevant, and it was a worse option than bidialectalism. Arthur Jensen in an article in 1969[270] submitted that the remedial and compensatory educational programs designed in response to the verbal deprivation materials he and others had developed were failures. He suggested that this failure was an indication that the environmental hypothesis on which the verbal deficit notion was based was faulty and that psychologists ought to replace the environmental hypothesis with a genetic one.

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Jensen argued that the middle class white population is differentiated from the working class white and Negro populations in the ability to achieve "cognitive or conceptual learning," which Jensen labels Level II intelligence as opposed to mere "associative learning, " or Level I intelligence. The genetic factors involved in each of these levels are presumed to have become distributed within the population as a function of social class.

I have suggested that the bidialectal movement is merely covert eradication and that the basic fallacy of these movements has been in tracing the educational failures of the black to his personal deficiencies. There has always been the alternative to blame the educational institution for not working. Jensen nor any other of the verbal deprivation theorists chose to investigate this possibility, possibly because the school in our culture has such a monopoly over attitudes that it can choose and certify its own critics. Perhaps, too, this explains why linguists challenged the deficit theory and why some linguists have questioned the wisdom of the bidialectal movement: because the prescriptive notion has been the school notion and the descriptive notion the linguistic notion there has always been a certain tension between linguists and schools. This mutual distrust placed the linguist in a better position to criticize the institution.

At any rate, Jensen's movement in opting for the "inevitable hypothesis" of genetic inferiority of the Negro people to explain the educational failure of the urban ghetto black represents the ultimate in the protection of the institution and the logical extension of the verbal deficit theory. There was nothing new about the Jensen option in the history of our race relations--after all, the "best science" of the 19th century was able to demonstrate the genetic inferiority of

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blacks by the fact that Ethiopian skulls held fewer dried seeds than Caucasian skulls. Jensen used, for example, studies that purported to show that almost half of lower class children are mentally retarded,[271] a demonstration equally as ridiculous but more sophisticated in 20th century terms. So it is not new, but the option is nonetheless a severe threat because it goes beneath the normal cultural tensions to throw doubt on the touchstone of our cultural existence, and it is not a member of the Ku Klux Klan doing this. It is an honorable but benighted member of our central institution, the school, doing so in defense of that institution, and doing so not in some fly-by-night racist newsletter, but in the Harvard Educational Review.

Compared to Jensenism, to which it is related distantly, the bidialectal option seems downright desirable. Nevertheless, the nature of language and speech communities suggests other options.

The ultimate and saving option lies in the nature of linguistic authority. The only kind of authority the eradicationists or bidialectalists seemed to recognize is the formal authority of the book and classroom--the systematized, conscious drill in linguistic behavior. But linguists are confident that this authority is considerably less effective than the natural nurse of the speech community--informal authority.[272] Informal authority is the natural, unforced, largely unconscious tendency of people who habitually speak to each other to adjust their linguistic behavior to the behavior of others in the community. Informal authority is always at work and its force is inevitable. If a person changes speech communities informal authority will work on him until his speech habits adjust to those of the new community, at least to the point that his speech is not noticeably alien. If a person chooses not to change his community and to retain

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his linguistic identity, he may just as properly do this.

The point is that "code switching" (as it is termed in sociolinguistic jargon) is a well known phenomenon. Sociolinguists agree that there are no single style speech communities.[273] Therefore, the advocates of enforced bidialectalism do not go amiss in assuming that switching is theoretically possible. The problem is that the bidialectalists actually have the whole process backwards. Dialect change is more naturally the consequence of social change than it is the cause of it. If a speaker of black English is first given a job that offers him opportunities for mobility, and if he does as a result change communities, his speech, through the agency of informal authority, will change to reflect the speech of his new community. If a ghetto child relates in a healthy way to education and becomes an educated person, he will acquire the cultivated social dialect as a result of this process--through reading and by speaking habitually to other cultivated speakers. The process requires some time and patience on the part of linguistically uptight teachers, but it will happen if the student makes the commitment to join the educated speech community.

The bidialectalists go amiss, then, in putting the linguistic cart before the linguistic horse. They are motivated in this, it would seem, by the intense cultural pressure of the notion of mobility, coupled with the strong continuity of prescriptivism with its drive for uniformity and conformity. The black English problem is, linguistically speaking, a phoney problem, but given the nature of American culture it is real and crucial. Because Americans have such a mania for correctness, are so neurotic about difference in speech habits that make no real difference so far as communication is concerned, one could not simply ask that employers and teachers relax their holy linguistic

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watchfulness and let the natural informal authority of the speech community enforce sufficient linguistic conformity so that people who need to talk together can, as it has done at least since there has been anything known about language.

The historical configuration that this study has drawn from the educational and linguistic data of the 19th and 20th centuries will not admit this solution. The puritan-genteel values of the school system in the co-optive strategy used so effectively by the culture operated to keep the linguistic-descriptive-relativistic ethic in position of mere challenger to the prescriptive ethic. The failure of 20th century relativism to penetrate the school's value system so far as "English" is concerned results in a virtual recapitulation of the 19th century pattern developed in Chapters One and Two. In a real sense in terms of linguistic attitudes and school attitudes the 19th century is our history.

In view of this, if our culture is to have other dominant attitudes new and alternative institutions must develop (and perhaps are developing) to contain and express other dominant attitudes. So far as linguistic attitudes go, our school system contains and expresses the 19th century.

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CONCLUSION

There was a significant challenge to prescriptive linguistic attitudes in the decades of the 1820's, 30's, and 40's, a challenge consistent with the social and intellectual spirit of the times. The remarkable thing, therefore, is not that it occurred, but that scholarship today does not generally recognize nor credit the challenge. The doctrine of correctness in the present time has become so strong and accepted that it has led to the misperception that the correctness doctrine has reached across American history from the 18th century to the present.

The thought of the decades of the 1850's, 60's, and 70's signals an increased, conscious drive for linguistic conformity. This development also accords very well with the general cultural and intellectual pattern of the period. Two features of the prescriptive drive in this period are noteworthy, however. For one thing the doctrine of correctness takes on a neurotic tendency; it becomes a mania for correctness. Second, this reaffirmation of the prescriptive attitude occurs at such a crucial point in American history that the strength of the reaffirmation carries the configuration far beyond its own time.

For this reason, the pattern of linguistic attitudes in the first half of the 20th century does not accord with the general social and intellectual pattern. Indeed, the 20th century in America so far gives every appearance of being a replay of the 19th century, as far as linguistic attitudes are concerned. This is historically shocking

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because the general social and intellectual forces of this century--relativism and science--are antithetical to this linguistic pattern that has prescriptive attitudes dominant in both the intellectual and popular mind.

Chapter Three suggests that the genteel tradition had been important to the maintenance of the prescriptive pattern since the third quarter of the 19th century. Probably the genteel tradition has even more importance to the maintenance of the prescriptive configuration than the one tracing in Chapter Three suggests. The reason for this is that thinking about the prescriptive pattern inevitably takes one back to the fact that the genteel tradition, urbanization, and the broadening of education occur at about the same moment in American history. History teaches us that the values that a place, idea, or institution begins with, all things being equal, will have a significant and often crucial influence on that place, idea, or institution ever after.

Repeatedly the sources, data, and patterns of this study exhibit the suggestion that the confluence in the second half of the 19th century of the genteel tradition--with its reassertion of puritan values of community, and urbanization--with its values of mobility, with the beginning of the educational institution as we have come to know it in the 20th century must in the long run account for the remarkable pattern that this study draws for language attitudes in the 20th century. For the school seems to have been the main agency for the pattern, which depends for its shape, and for its vigor against the competing ethos of science and relativism, on a manic sense of community and the nearly unquestioned value of mobility.

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The Third International controversy and the black English controversy demonstrate the uncommon hold that the correctness doctrine has on our own time. These controversies also give some insight into the means by which the prescriptive status quo is maintained with an alien general culture--principally by genteel co-optive devices and by linking the prescriptive linguistic goals with seemingly desirable social and political goals.

Thus, in the area of linguistic attitudes, the 20th century contains the 19th century.

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER FOUR

118 Philip B. Gove, Ed. (Springfield, Mass., 1961).

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120 Dictionaries . . . ., p. 50.

121 The Chicago Tribune (September 7, 1961); The Chicago Sun Times (September 7, 1961); Dictionaries . . . ., pp. 51-53.

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136 (September 16, 1961), p. 89; Dictionaries . . . ., pp. 57-58.

137 Most academics apparently identified with Follet's attack in the Atlantic.

138 Graham Du Shane, "Say It 'Ain't' So," (November 10, 1961), p. 1493; Dictionaries . . . ., pp. 90-91.

139 B. Hunter Smeaton, "A Review of Webster's Third New International Dictionary," (January 15, 1962), p. 211; Dictionaries . . . ., pp. 123-25.

140 Ibid.

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142 Mario Pei is one of the few linguists whose books other linguists sometimes list in their bibliographies with notes urging readers not to take them seriously, thus giving Pei an uncommon distinction.

143 "'Ain't' is In, Raviolis 'Ain't'," (October 22, 1961), p. 6; Dictionaries . . . ., pp. 82-84.

144 "English as It's Used Belongs in Dictionary," (November 25, 1961), p. 44; Dictionaries . . . ., pp. 96-99.

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148 Ibid., p. 77.

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151 "Three Questions . . . .," p. 258.

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153 Kilburn, p. 267.

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156 "On New Words and New Meanings," St. Louis Post Dispatch, (December 17, 1961); Dictionaries . . . . ., p. 103.

157 Ibid.

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid.

160 Kilburn, p. 266.

161 "Three Questions . . . . .," p. 264.

162 Ibid., p. 262.

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165 Pp. 270-71.

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167 Christopher Small, "A Review of Webster's Third New International Dictionary," (February 27, 1962); Dictionaries . . . . ., p. 154.

168 "Third International," (March 2, 1962), p. 304; Dictionaries . . . . ., p. 154.

169 "A Review of Webster's Third New International Dictionary," (March 16, 1962), p. 148; Dictionaries . . . . ., p. 199.

170 In addition to the AHD discussed in the text: Wilson Follet was so outraged with Webster's Third that he commenced to write a highly prescriptive usage guide, Modern American Usage (New York, 1966). Follet died before the book was completed. However, clear testimony to the strength of the prescriptive notion among American intellectuals is the fact that the book was edited and completed by Jacques Barzun, in collaboration with Carlos Baker, F. W. Dupree, Dudley Fitts, James D. Hart, Phyllis McGinley, and Lionel Trilling.

171 "Dictionaries: The Most Unique," Newsweek (March 12, 1962) pp. 104-05.

172 Ibid., p. 105.

173 William Morris, Ed., American Heritage and Houghton Mifflin (New York, 1969). Hereinafter referred to as AHD.

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174 p. vii.

175 Ibid.

176 Morris Bishop, "Good Usage, Bad Usage and Usage," AHD, p. xxi.

177 Ibid., p. xxiv.

178 Ibid., p. xxiii.

179 Ibid., p. xxiv.

180 Such as Donald J. Lloyd cited in Chapter One.

181 Morris, p. xxiv.

CHAPTER FIVE

182 Kenneth R. Johnson, "Unit VII: Improving Language Skills of the Culturally Disadvantaged," Teaching Culturally Disadvantaged Pupils. From a pre-publication mimeographed excerpt. This is a book for grades K-12.

183 Linguists point out that the speech of radio and TV announcers represents an occupational dialect, not evidence of a standard.

184 Raven I. McDavid, Jr., "The Dialects of American English," Chapter Nine of Francis, 480-543, p. 540.

185 Jean Malmstrom, "Dialects--Updated, " Linguistic Cultural Differences and American Education, Special Anthology Issue of the Florida FL Reporter, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Spring/Summer, 1969), p. 47. Herein after referred to as L-CD.

186 Johnson, "Is There a Negro Dialect?", same mimeographed materials.

187 Both Stewart and Labov are leading sociolinguists, much of whose work is cited in this chapter. The textbook cited in the text refers to papers read at meeting and to mimeographed material not available to this writer.

188 "Urban Negro Speech: Sociolinguistic Factors Affecting English Teaching," L-CD, p. 51.

189 Dwight Bolinger, Aspects of Language (New York, 1968), p. 150.

190 Ibid., p. 149.

191 The forthcoming J. L. Dillard, Black English (New York, 1972), argues in a full-length book aimed at the general educated but non-technical audience the thesis of W. E. Steward as regards Black English as a relexification a West Indian proto-creole.

192 Malmstrom, p. 168.

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195 Malmstrom, p. 168.

196 Stephen S. Baratz and Joan C. Baratz, "Negro Ghetto Children and Urban Education: A Cultural Solution," L-CD, p. 14.

197 J. L. Dillard, "The Urban Language Study of the Center for Applied Linguistics," The Linguistic Reporter, Vol. 8 (October, 1966). p. 2.

198 Roger W. Shuy, Walter A. Wolfram and William K. Riley, Linguistic Correlates of Social Stratification in Detroit Speech, (East Lansing, Michigan, 1967), pp. 22-24, 7-23. Herein after referred to as DDS.

199 McDavid, "Checklist . . . .," p. 7.

200 P. 10.

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204 Ibid.

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213 "Poverty, Early Language Deprivation, and Language Learning Activity," 43 (February, 1966), pp. 129-33.

214 Ibid., p. 16.

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216 Ibid., p. 18.

217 Truman R. Temple, "A Program for Overcoming the Handicap of Dialect," New Republic (March 25, 1967), (reprint), p. 3.

218 Ibid,, p. 3.

219 "English: New Dimensions and New Demands," Dimensions of Dialect, pp. 1-6.

220 Quoted in Joan C. Baratz, "Who Should Do What to Whom . . . and Why?" L-CD, p. 75.

221 William Labov, "The Logic of Non-Standard English," L-CD, p. 60.

222 There are many scholarly sources of the deprivation theory, e.g., Basil Bernstein, "Elaborated and Restricted Codes: Their Social Origins and Some Consequences," Communication and Culture: Readings in Codes of Human Interaction, ed. by Alfred G. Smith (New York,1966), pp. 422-441; Martin Deutsch and Associates, The Disadvantaged Child (New York, 1967); Martin Deutsch, Irwin Katz, and Arthur R. Jensen, eds., Social Class, Race, and Psychological Development (New York, 1968).

223 Labov is an Associate Professor in the Department of Linguistics at Columbia University.

224 P. 60.

225 Ibid.

226 P. 64.

227 P. 3.

228 Labov, p. 65.

229 Ibid., p. 67.

230 Ibid., p. 71.

231 Ibid., p. 72.

232 Baratz and Baratz, p. 151.

233 "Relativism Is Absolutely Out of Place in School," Los Angeles Times, Part II (November 7, 1966).

234 Improving Patterns of Language Usage (Detroit, 1960), p. 5.

235 P. 130.

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239 Ibid., p. 81.

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241 "How to Tell the Bandits from the Good Guys or, What Dialect to Teach?" L-CD, p. 85.

242 DDS, p. 17.

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266 Thomas Kochman, "Culture and Communication: Implications for Black English in the Classroom," L-CD, p. 89ff.

267 Richard Buffum, "The Right to Compete," Los Angeles Times (February 9, 1971) Part II, p. 1.

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270 Arthur R. Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost I.Q. and Scholastic Achievement?" Harvard Educational Review, XXXIX (Winter, 1969), pp. 1-123.

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